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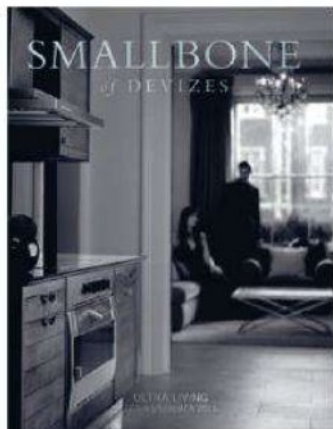
## Country culture special

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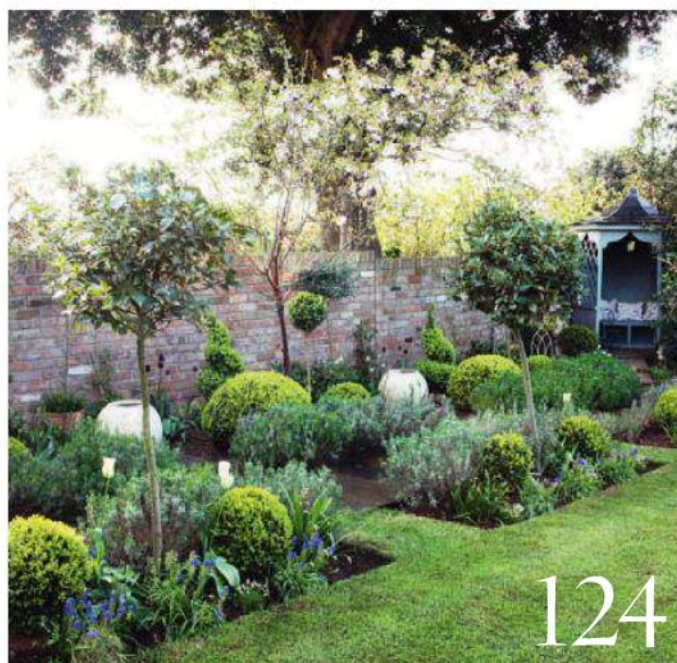
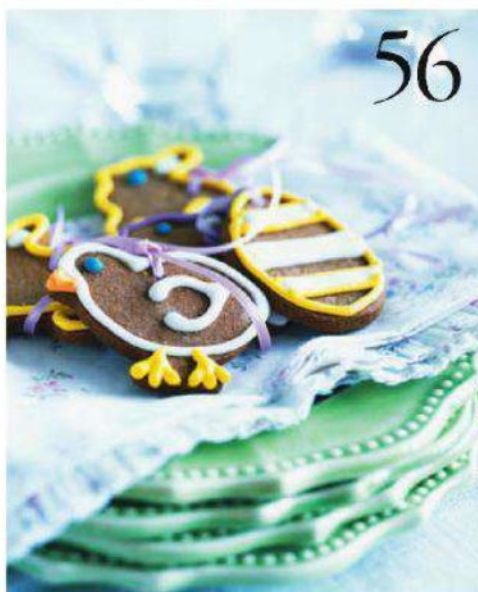
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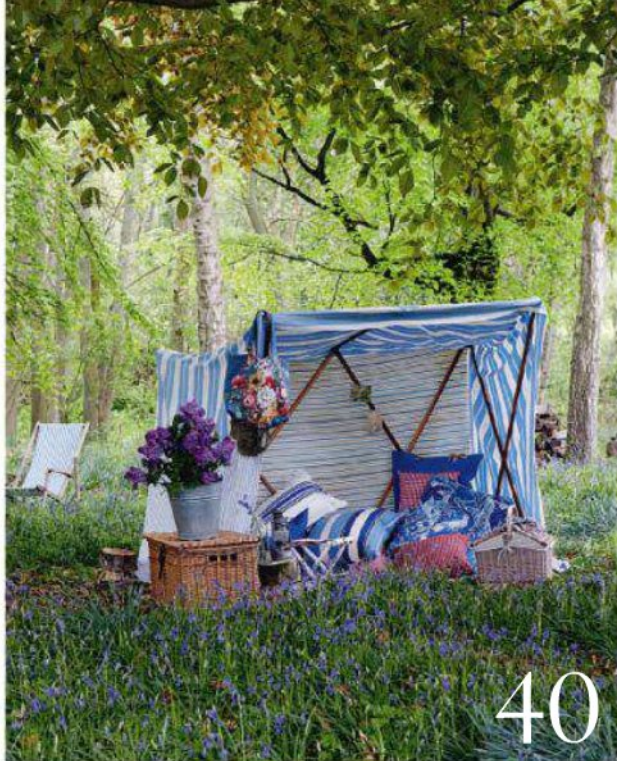


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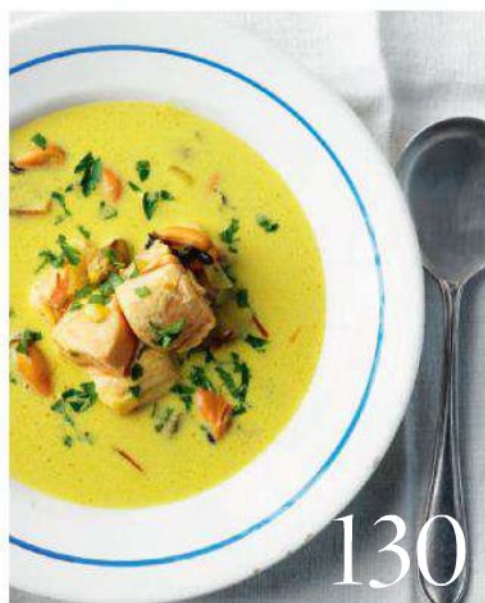
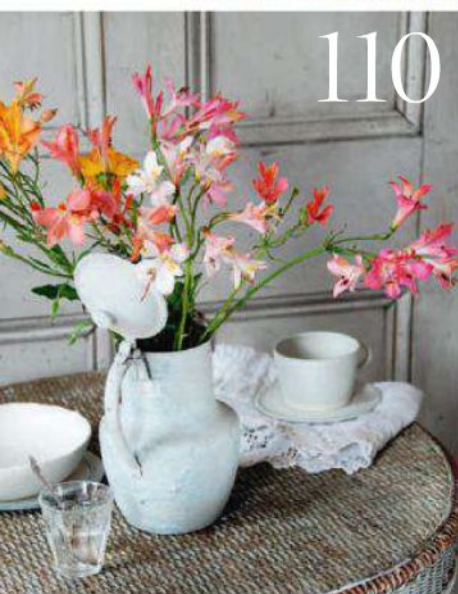






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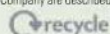
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## COUNTRY LIVING AWARDS

2010

**Crown Interior Stylist  
of the Year Award**  
Caroline Reeves

2008

**Guild of Food Writers  
Cookery Journalist  
of the Year**  
Shona Crawford Poole

2007

**Crown Interior Stylist  
of the Year Award**  
Hester Page

2006

**Consumer Lifestyle  
Magazine of the Year**  
PPA (Periodical  
Publishers Association)

**Editor of the Year,  
Lifestyle Magazines**  
Susy Smith,  
BSME (British Society of  
Magazine Editors)

**Best Coverage of  
Environmental Issues  
in a Magazine**  
BEMAs (British  
Environment and Media  
Awards)

2004

**Consumer Lifestyle  
Magazine of the Year**  
PPA

2003

**Guild of Food Writers  
Cookery Journalist  
of the Year award  
for work in CL**  
Annie Bell

1999

**Innovation of the Year  
for The Farmer Wants  
a Wife campaign**  
BSME

**H**ave you got talent? Of course you have – and we'd like you to tell us all about it. If you can grow, sew or cook, write, draw or make, you can enter our Kitchen Table Talent Awards. There are six categories and great prizes. In addition, we will select the most promising entrant and help them turn their natural gift into a successful business (page 84). And that's not all – make sure you take part in our online Celebrity Craft Auction. We have persuaded 20 well-known names, whose businesses have all grown from kitchen-table concepts, to donate items that are unique. How about these for starters: a patchwork chair from Laura Ashley, a personalised course at Perch Hill with Sarah Raven, a signed salad bowl by Sophie Conran, a hand-finished Turkey rug by Roger Oates or a hamper of Cath Kidston goodies?

You can preview the full auction catalogue and find out how to take part at [allaboutyou.com/](http://allaboutyou.com/) talent. But hurry – the eBay auction begins at 10am on 23 March and lasts for only seven days. The items will be on display at the *Country Living* Spring Fair (23-27 March) in London. All the money raised from the auction and from the £5 fee we are charging for each entry to the awards will go to our charity of the year, The Prince's Countryside Fund, which is working with big businesses on projects to help rural communities.

In case you need any more inspiration to get going, there is talent galore throughout this issue:



Poppy Treffry, whose hand-embroidered tea cosies have become bestsellers (page 78); Tina Bricknell-Webb who, despite no cookery training, runs Percy's Country Hotel in Devon where virtually all the fare on offer is produced by her husband and her on their organic farm (page 72); Rose Fisher, a florist in Somerset who ripped out her entire cottage garden and started again from scratch (page 124) and last, but not least, reader Frances Green, the deserving winner of our poetry competition. Read her winning words on page 51. This reminds me to mention our *Country Culture* special: if you think the arts are non-existent beyond the boundaries of our cities, then turn to page 98 for our inspiring review of regional theatres, museums, festivals and musical and literary events. And visit [allaboutyou.com/countryliving](http://allaboutyou.com/countryliving) for our pick of the best venues plus our monthly guide to what's on in the countryside.

*Susy Smith*

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# EMPORIUM

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## Natural appeal

**1** Chloe Cyphus's appealing rabbits (£18 each) are hand-crafted from vintage linens at her Wiltshire home. She also makes mice and a range of home accessories including bags and cushions from antique textiles (01985 213077; [chloeantiques.co.uk](http://chloeantiques.co.uk))

**2** Ideal for brightening up a wall while providing useful hanging space, this jolly red polka-dot bird hook (£3.95 for two) is from homeware retailer Sass & Belle. The set includes one left- and one right-facing bird and is also available in brown, blue and pink (020 7228 0281; [sassandbelle.co.uk](http://sassandbelle.co.uk))

**3** This little wooden weathervane (48cm x 24cm) by Moulin Roty would sit perfectly on top of a playhouse or shed and costs £20 (01885 490832; [cottontailsbaby.co.uk](http://cottontailsbaby.co.uk))

**4** A stylish statement as well as a future family heirloom, Richard Fairbrother's unique Conker rocking horse (£895) is handcrafted

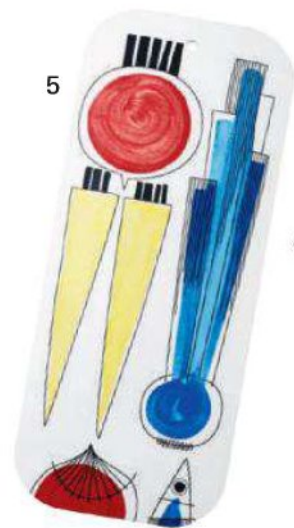
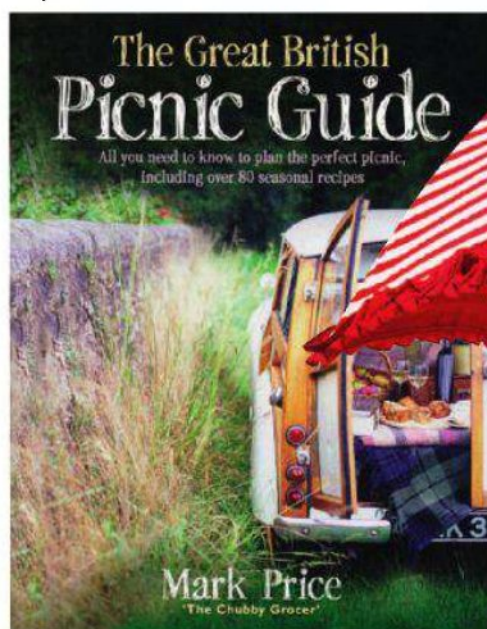
from solid walnut (shown), oak or maple (01278 588177; [richardfairbrother.com](http://richardfairbrother.com))

**5** Artist, illustrator and print-maker Mark Heard has designed a range of ceramics exclusively for the Tate. Produced by British firm Burleigh, these decorative earthenware pieces start at £15.95 for the bowl (020 7887 8888; [tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk))

**6** Inspired by a photograph in Danish newspapers of a policeman stopping traffic to let a family of ducks cross the road, in 1959 Danish designer Hans Bølling created his famous teak ducks. This reproduction duck is £76 and the ducklings are £45 each (020 7288 1996; [twentytwentyone.com](http://twentytwentyone.com))

**7** Keep bookshelves organised with these chubby Ollie Owl weighted bookends from Strawberry Fool. Made from grey linen and black faux leather, they are £14.99 for a pair (0845 226 9177; [strawberryfool.co.uk](http://strawberryfool.co.uk))





## Out and about

**1 Pick the perfect picnic spot** with the aid of *The Great British Picnic Guide* by Mark Price, which lists 20 top sites and provides maps and details of local food producers. To order for the special price of £13.99 incl p&p, call 0871 803 6764 or visit [allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk](http://allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk) ☒.

**2 Take shelter from April showers** in style under a spotty Carousel umbrella (from £19.50) by Bombay Duck. It is available in 11 colours including fuchsia, white and black (020 8749 3000; [bombayduck.co.uk](http://bombayduck.co.uk)) ☒.

**3 True to the Cornishware principles** of simplicity, quality and durability, the new Red range, originally trialled in the 1920s, has been reintroduced. These mugs are £40 for four (020 8874 6546; [tggreen.co.uk](http://tggreen.co.uk)) ☒.

**4 Laura Howard's jaunty bird brooches** (£14 each) are all individually made from felt and her collection includes goldfinches, blue tits and robins ([lupinhandmade.com](http://lupinhandmade.com)) ☒.

**5 Add a dash of colour to your kitchen** or alfresco feast with this Picknick loaf board (£17.95), which features a jolly vintage print (01989 740380; [newhousetextiles.co.uk](http://newhousetextiles.co.uk)) ☒.

**6 This small wooden bird house** (10cm x 10cm x 15cm) from The White Company is part of a set of three (one each in white, grey and pastel green), which costs £45 (0845 678 8150; [thewhitecompany.com](http://thewhitecompany.com)) ☒.

**7 Create your own lip balm** with these kits, which each make four petroleum-free balms: choose from Clear & Natural, £10.95, or Hint of a Tint, £12.95 (07976 910993; [www.thehomemadecompany.co.uk](http://www.thehomemadecompany.co.uk)) ☒.

**8 Made in England** from sustainable sweet chestnut, the National Trust's versatile range of outdoor furniture doubles up on its uses: the coffee table turns into a bench and the bench with arms becomes a dining table. From £450 (01420 588444; [gazebovill.com](http://gazebovill.com)) ▷



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## Spring greens

**1 Postcarden** is a mini living garden in the form of a postcard that you can send to someone special or keep for yourself. Just add water and it will spring to life. Allotment (shown) costs £7.50 ([postcarden.com](http://postcarden.com)) ☒.

**2 Columbia Road wallpaper** is one of the beautiful products from London-based design collective Cushtom. A 72cm x 1m roll is £139 (07843 241413; [cushom.co.uk](http://cushom.co.uk)) ☒.

**3 Yankee Candle's new range** of room fragrance candles combines the richness of vanilla with sweet cane sugar and a zesty lime twist. Available in three sizes from £7.49 (0845 602 1073; [houseoffraser.co.uk](http://houseoffraser.co.uk)) ☒.

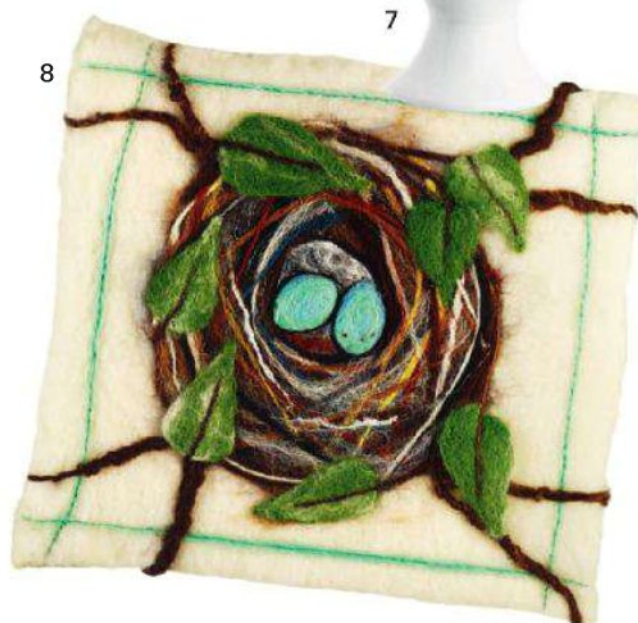
**4 Shoe designer Rae Jones** has branched out with this stylish weekend bag. Handmade in England from traditional deckchair canvas, it folds into a pouch and can then be used as a clutch. It costs £269 and also comes in plain khaki (020 8986 4301; [raejones.co.uk](http://raejones.co.uk)) ☒.

**5 Store essential garden tools** in Sparrow and Finch's smart Beehive Shed (61cm x 91cm x 183cm), £399.95, shown here in French Grey with cedar roof tiles (01892 861202; [sparrowandfinch.co.uk](http://sparrowandfinch.co.uk)) ☒.

**6 Inspired by the landscape** around Marseille, Compagnie de Provence's home range includes this linen water, which comes in two fresh fragrances, from £6.80 (0800 123 400; [selfridges.com](http://selfridges.com)) ☒.

**7 This hand-knitted bunny egg cosy** by Sarah Benning with its hand-stitched face and pom-pom tail would enliven any breakfast table and costs £6.50 (01793 704169; [theblueberrypatch.co.uk](http://theblueberrypatch.co.uk)) ☒.

**8 Hand-felted by Frances Haigh** in Devon, this unique bird's nest artwork (£60) is created using natural wool roving (pre-spun wool) and colourful felt pieces (01803 856756; [proinnseas.co.uk](http://proinnseas.co.uk)) ☒. 🐣






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A black and white photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a white button-down shirt, leaning over a wooden cutting board. He is using a large knife in his right hand and a carving fork in his left hand to slice a large, dark roast beef. The background is softly blurred, showing a kitchen setting with some bowls. A semi-transparent white box with red text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

“COOKING ROAST BEEF  
JUST HOW I LIKE IT  
USED TO BE A BIT OF  
A CHALLENGE.”



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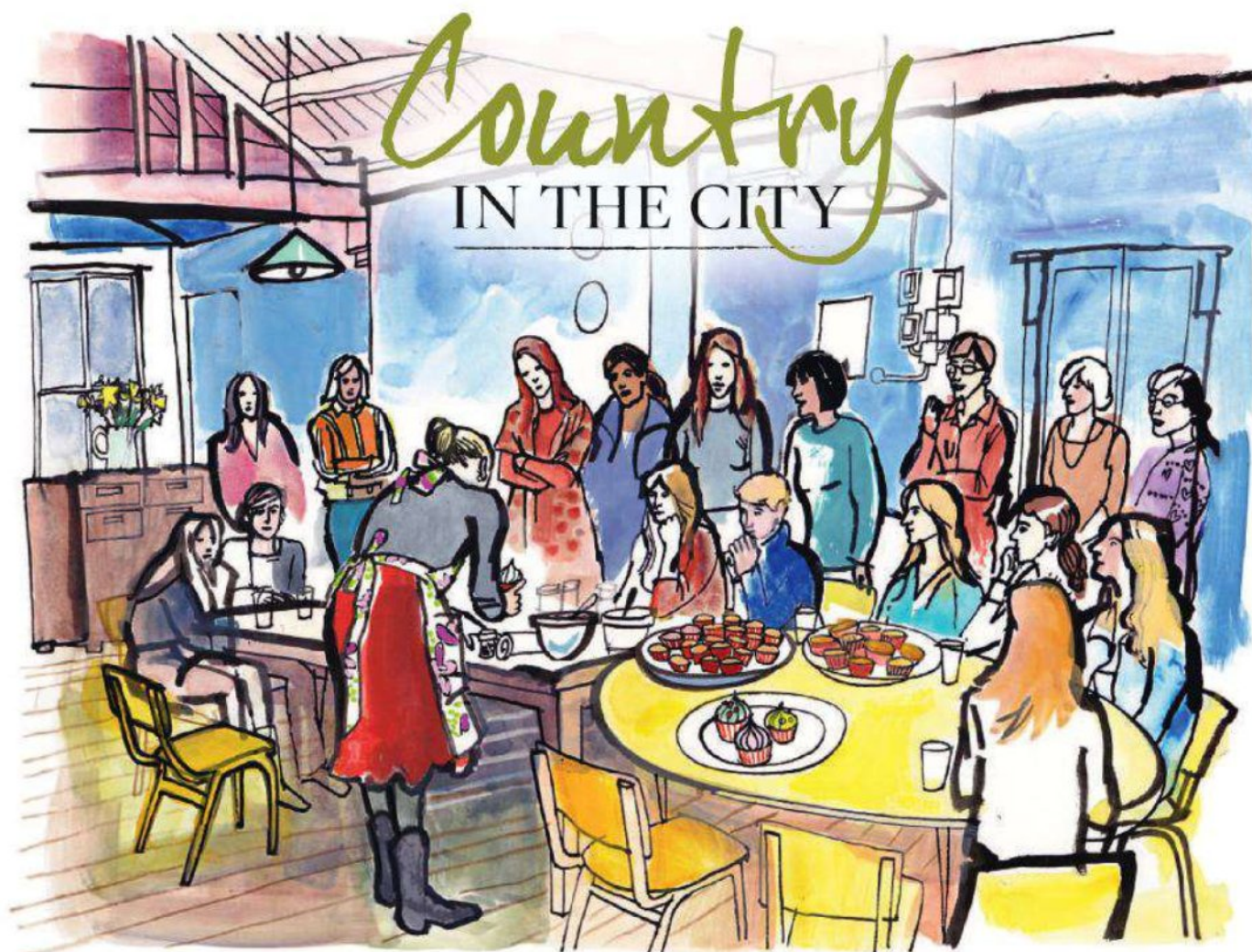


# HARLEQUIN momentum



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Taking inspiration from CL's series, *Your Community Needs You!*, I decided that after nearly ten years in my Hackney home it was high time I made an effort to become part of

some form of neighbourhood network.

Hearing that the lifeblood of many country parishes, the Women's Institute, had opened a new branch in my area, provided me with the perfect kickstart – here was an opportunity to broaden my knowledge, my circle of local acquaintances and also do a bit of good, I thought.

It was with some trepidation, though, that I set off for my first monthly meeting, unsure of exactly what to expect but imagining that a cold, draughty hall and an enforced rendition of *Jerusalem* before a lengthy lecture would be on the agenda. My preconceptions were soon over-turned when I stepped into an urban studio transformed into a retro-style sitting room complete with comfortable armchairs and sofas, flickering candles, fresh flowers and plates of homemade cakes to tuck into as I met my fellow new members.

Formed a few months ago, the Dalston Darlings are part of a new-wave of WI groups in the capital. It is drawing on the movement's strong history and heritage but introducing fresh, contemporary elements to increase appeal, offering talks by luminaries from the worlds of fashion, politics and the arts, and using social media to spread the word. "We'll be covering the

Can a city dweller enjoy a taste of the good life?

**Louise Elliott** reports from her urban neighbourhood

**This month: the WI**

traditional topics, such as cooking and handicrafts, and be raising money for local charities," vice-president Charlotte Hotham told me, "but we also want to reflect the area's diversity. There'll be talks on everything from sewing to sex!"

The mood in the room was warm and welcoming as a steady stream of women joined the informal gathering

and further preconceptions were dispelled. I had imagined that I might be one of the youngest members but, with most people looking around 30, I disappointedly decided I was one of the oldest. And a dry lecture wasn't on offer either – we were all delighted to discover that the evening's programme would involve an interactive cupcake masterclass by food stylist and writer Annie Rigg. We gathered around a long wooden table as she deftly and expertly turned plain cakes into mini works of art, while answering an enthusiastic flow of questions on how to achieve the best results.

'Make and do' is very much part of the Dalston Darlings' philosophy and it was soon our turn to have a go. We all relished the chance to get creative and glean expert tips, not to mention the opportunity to meet a fresh group of like-minded people. I left with my rather over-colourful cupcake and the feeling that I had found a whole new community right on my doorstep. 🍪

*Dalston Darlings* ([dalstondarlings.com](http://dalstondarlings.com)). *WI* ([thewi.org.uk](http://thewi.org.uk)).





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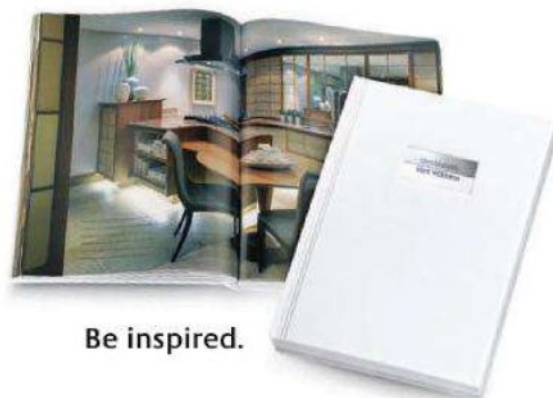


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# Discover

## LIFE'S SIMPLE PLEASURES

books • walks • makes • nature • growing • baking • visits • skills • pets



EDITED BY RUTH CHANDLER

### A seed to sow...

**Borage** Sow this herb now to enjoy the subtle flavour of its flowers and foliage as a garnish in summery drinks. The nectar-rich, hardy annual will look just as pretty in your beds and play its part in encouraging beneficial insects such as bees – place next to tomato plants to boost pollination.

### A place to go...

**Blossom orchard** Don't miss the magnificent show of bursting buds on fruit trees this month. Discover your nearest plantation or local trail for a scented, pastel show of apple, cherry, gage, pear, plum and quince flowers. Children will love the way the petals fall to the ground and you might have the chance to enjoy tea in the orchard.



### A walk to take...

**Bird-watching** Binoculars at the ready: April is the liveliest month in the ornithological calendar. Join experts for a guided stroll around a reserve to observe avian inhabitants nesting and foraging to feed their young, while migrants arrive from foreign climes. If you're able to open your eyes and tune your ears in time, rise with the lark to catch the seasonal concert of early morning song and learn how to identify birds through their calls on an organised dawn-chorus walk.

### Something to make

**Easter egg cones** This simple seasonal offering will make an individual gift for guests at an Easter lunch. Take a sheet of pretty wrapping paper and another of tissue for the lining and cut into large triangles. Roll into a cone-shape, securing with staples or tape, and fill with miniature eggs or sugared almonds if you prefer. ▷



For more information about these projects and ideas, visit [allaboutyou.com/simplepleasures](http://allaboutyou.com/simplepleasures)



## The art of... DOG TRAINING



**DIFFERENT BREEDS** of dog will have varying levels of ability, so research the type you own before you demand too little (leading to boredom and 'naughtiness') or too much (frustration for both you and your dog). Begin by following our basic tips, whether you have a Jack Russell terrier or a Great Dane, for some good canine behaviour.

First, you need to understand how your pet thinks. Dogs are pack animals so command their respect by becoming the leader. Some of the more confident will constantly challenge you, in which case maintaining your number one position by being consistently authoritative is crucial.

Combine verbal commands, hand gestures and eye contact with your pet for the best response. When training a dog to sit, lie down or

walk on the lead, reward a good performance immediately with treats, favourite toys, stroking and the appropriate word or phrase for praise such as 'yes', 'good girl' or incorporating the dog's name so that your pet makes the connection. Dogs' strong survival instincts mean that food is of great importance to them, so suitable biscuits are often the most effective incentive. Take a supply while out walking, too.

Similarly, scold your dog for bad behaviour with a firm verbal order such as 'no' or 'leave it'. If you are responding to an event you haven't witnessed avoid disciplining the dog as he or she may be confused about what you're referring to. Consistency is key: don't change your approach or vocabulary halfway through training and expect your pupil to follow through.



Plymouth  
Rock



### KNEAD TO KNOW

**Glean essential baking tips from CL's Food and Drink Editor** Make a batch of warm hot-cross buns taste even more special by preparing your own mixed spice blend. In a pestle and mortar, grind together 1 small cinnamon stick with 1 tablespoon each of whole cloves, mace, coriander seeds, allspice berries and ground nutmeg. Store in a sealed jar out of the light and use within a month. *For this month's recipe, visit [allaboutyou.com/simplepleasures](http://allaboutyou.com/simplepleasures)*

### A HENKEEPER'S DIARY

## April

I couldn't resist the offer of a few fertile eggs to try in this traditional month for hatching. Placed in the electric incubator on my kitchen worktop, it's been 21 days of anticipation as the mechanism has rocked them back and forth. Eleven of the Araucana, Buff Orpington and Rhode Island Reds have emerged, fluffy and cheeping, and are now wandering about like toddlers in the sawdust: colliding, eating crumb, drinking water and suddenly falling asleep in the warmth of the red warming lamp in their brooder. They're already beginning to grow wing feathers and will be running around an outside run in a matter of weeks.

**Ruth Chandler** Read Ruth's blog at [allaboutyou.com](http://allaboutyou.com) ▸

For more tips on dog training, visit [allaboutyou.com/simplepleasures](http://allaboutyou.com/simplepleasures)



# Have you heard the buzz...

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*The Irish Times*

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Kenilworth	Bank Interiors - 01926 854 236
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## Living landscapes... A RIVER VALLEY

The Stour divides the 'south folk' (Suffolk) and 'east Saxons' (Essex) today as it always has, draining the heavy claylands of Constable country. Its pastoral surroundings were made world-famous by the paintings of Thomas Gainsborough and Paul Nash as well as John Constable. One of the first rivers in England to be improved, barges known as 'lighters' plied their trade here for 200 years. Now The River Stour Trust seeks to restore navigation on this classic lowland

river valley from Sudbury to the sea following its renovation of the locks at Dedham, Flatford and Great Cornard. To cruise its slow-flowing meanders is to wind among hedged water meadows and river-bank willows. There are few towns but timber-framed, thatched houses offer a sense of the past. Poignantly, these landscapes are the more precious for knowing that most East Anglian grasslands have been drained for arable farming. *Lisa Sykes*

## A sense of place

### SUFFOLK

● **Akenfield** by Ronald Blythe  
(Penguin Classics, £9.99)

Published in the 1960s, "this statement about living in an East Anglian village at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century" as Blythe describes his book, is composed of a series of oral histories from its inhabitants. Aware that a way of life was dying, the author visited cottages and farms to glean memories and insights into rural life. Among the speakers are agricultural labourers turned First World War survivors, orchard workers, teachers, doctors, and thatchers. The collection of their voices has become a treasured classic, while Ronald Blythe continues to write about country life: other work includes *Words from Wormingford*, about the village on the Essex-Suffolk border where he lives.

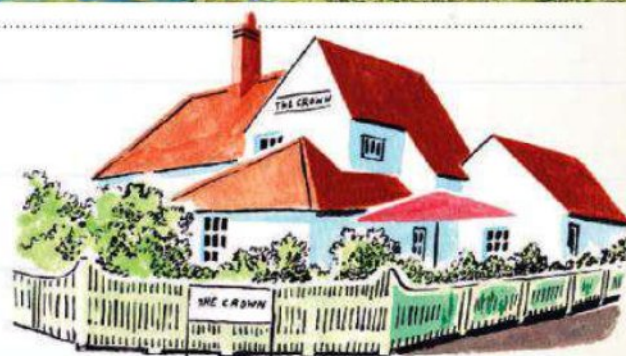
● **Traditional Crafts and Industries in East Anglia – The Photographic Legacy of Hallam Ashley**

(English Heritage, £16.99)

From reed cutters near Horning Ferry in Norfolk, 1949, to flower-growers in Lincolnshire, 1951, Hallam's collection of black and white photographs pays tribute to the rural workers in this region.

● **Suffolk Churches** by David Stanford (Frances Lincoln, £14.99)

This county is home to hundreds of places of worship built on the wool trade that brought wealth in the Middle Ages. Beautifully illustrated, this lavish book documents the diversity of styles that characterise each building.



### A PLACE TO STAY

**The Crown**, Stoke-by-Nayland, Suffolk (01206 262001; [crowninn.net](http://crowninn.net))

You can see and taste Constable country at this weatherboarded hotel that settles into the landscape so well you wouldn't guess it was built in 2008. Next door in the 16th-century inn, the dinner menu showcases ingredients from the area such as the Blytheburgh pork terrine served with a local quince chutney. After a delectable breakfast, I made my way to the church which features in many of John Constable's pictures. Dinner and double B&B from £135. **Ruth Chandler** ▸



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## PARISH NOTICES



### Readers' pets

**Name:** Daisy, silver tabby

**Age:** 2

**Loves:** Watching *Springwatch* on the television

**Hates:** Being cold

**Naughtiest habit:**

Curtain twitching

**Favourite food:** Fish-flavoured cat biscuits

**Dreams of:** Being in CL's 'Readers' Pets'

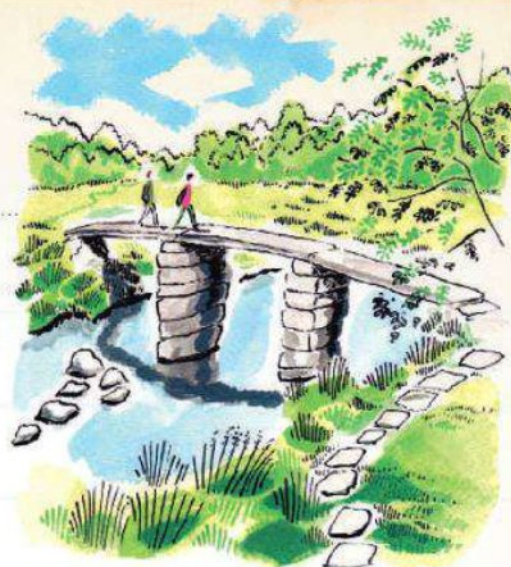
*David Kenward, Kent*

### FAVOURITE THINGS...

Each month a member of the CL team picks one of their most treasured possessions

"A colleague gave me this mug for Christmas two years ago. It's from **Brixton Pottery**, a small company now based in mid-Wales which has been making ceramics for more than 20 years. The hand-sponged decoration has a naive charm that captures the essence of designs from the early 19th-century. I've always had Border Collies so the image is particularly apt."

**Ben Kendrick,**  
*Home Design Editor*



### LOCAL LANDMARKS

Composed of vast granite slabs resting on two central piers of the same rock, **the clapper bridge in the village of Postbridge, Dartmoor**, is probably the best known of these structures that are peculiar to the area. It is believed to have been built by tin workers and farmers enabling crossings over the numerous watercourses that feature in the moorland. Spanning the East Dart River, it has survived centuries of swells and pedestrian traffic to remain a landmark of great beauty in the National Park.

Leicestershire boasts two quirky customs on Easter Monday. In the 'bottle kicking' event, the villagers of Hallaton and Medbourne battle over three wooden kegs, while the 'hare pie scramble' involves a procession led by the said baked offering.

## My country living... THE BAKER

As part of our series profiling people in rural professions, Cumbria-based Patrick Moore tells us about his job.

"I was a chef for 20 years before starting my own artisan bakery in 2006. I work through the night, beginning at around 2am. Most of the breads require 16-18 hour fermentations and I spend my time baking, moulding and mixing for the next day

and checking that the delivery vans go out on time.

"I was based at home for the first two years which was hard because the family would be upstairs asleep while I baked. Now I work in a converted mill in the village of Staveley, with mountains and fells as a backdrop. I employ 11 people, including four other full-time bakers.

We've a shop of our own and

have stands at farmers' markets, food festivals and events – once we made six-foot planks of focaccia for a hog roast at a wedding.

"The most enjoyable part of this job is still the smell of the bread baking, taking the warm loaves out of the oven and putting them in baskets." *More? The Artisan Bakery, Staveley, Cumbria (01539 822297; moreartisan.co.uk)*



To tell us about your pet, village or events, e-mail [features@countryliving.co.uk](mailto:features@countryliving.co.uk)





# HARVEY JONES KITCHENS



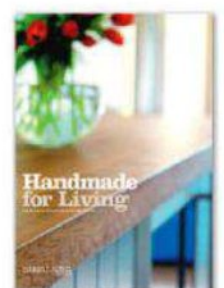
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#### Leg of lamb

Whether it be Welsh or good old English, you can't beat a joint of roast lamb - just make sure you garnish it in herbs and garlic!

#### Sea salt

From sea to lamb - sprinkle liberally and enjoy.



#### Black pepper

Freshly ground black pepper adds just the right amount of culinary gusto to your own.



#### Sweet potatoes

These bite-sized pieces of caramelised orange loveliness soak up the gravy and will have everyone fighting for the last piece.



#### Red Wine

The perfect accompaniment to roast lamb whether making a rich full-bodied gravy or served up at the table - salut!



#### Garlic

An aromatic complement to the lamb - be reckless and throw in another couple of cloves...



OPENSOURCE

## The vital ingredient for roast lamb.

With 20% more room than a standard built-in single oven, the Hotpoint Openspace makes cooking roast lamb a pleasure instead of a logistical nightmare. The insulating divider creates two independently controlled cooking spaces, so while the lamb browns to perfection in the bottom, the Yorkshires sizzle in the top...double oven versatility in a single oven space. [hotpoint.co.uk](http://hotpoint.co.uk)

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#### Rosemary

One of the quintessential Mediterranean aromas - enough to turn the most austere British day into a food holiday.





# In the GARDEN

Our monthly guide to organic gardening *By Stephanie Donaldson*

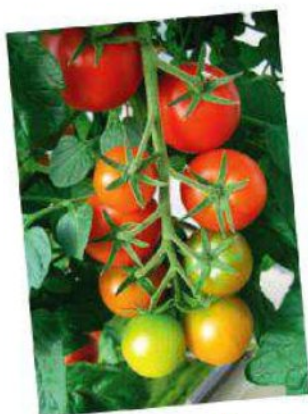


## Annual inspiration

Much as the idea of creating a wildflower meadow appeals, they can be hard to establish or sustain. Pictorial Meadows' seed mixes were developed as an easy-to-grow alternative with colourful blends of annuals that can be sown each year to give a similar

natural effect. The flowers bloom for months on end and it's an ideal solution to brighten a new garden until you get to grips with more permanent planting. Eight different flower mixes are available from [pictorialmeadows.co.uk](http://pictorialmeadows.co.uk) and also de Jager (01622 840229; [dejager.co.uk](http://dejager.co.uk)).

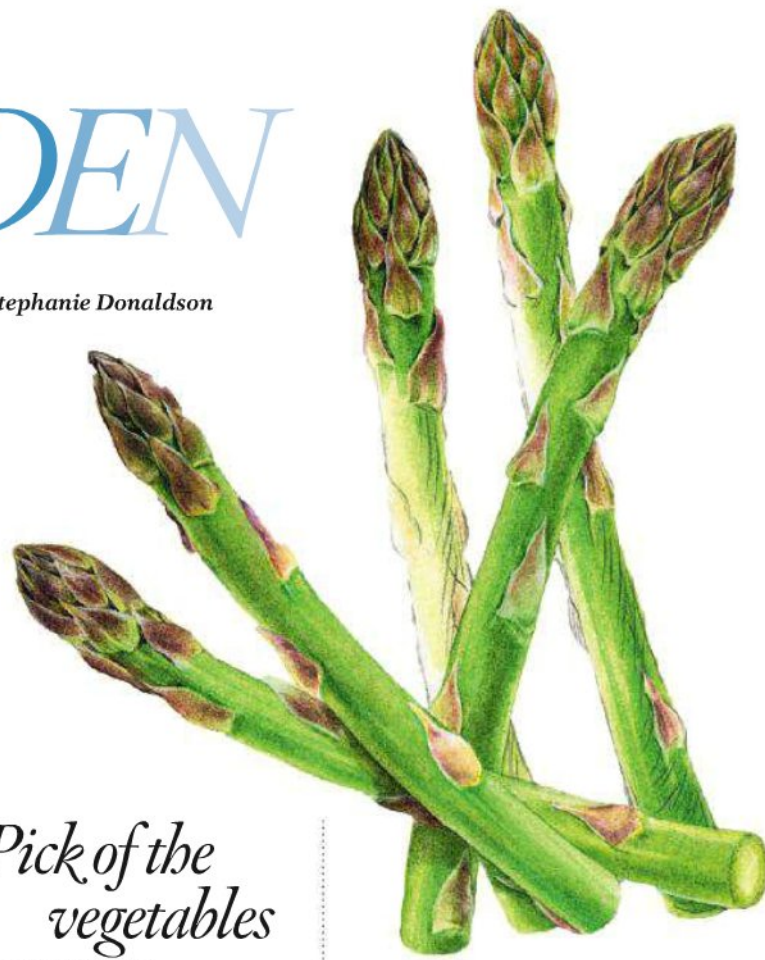
RHS LINDLEY LIBRARY/ILLUSTRATION BY PETULA STONE



## Tastes of summer

Delfland Nurseries grows more than a million organic tomato plants every year and is offering CL readers a collection of its best-performing varieties, all with excellent flavour: buy one plant each of 'Sungold', 'Sakura', 'Celine', 'Tigerella', 'Caran' and 'Velocity F1' for £15. Basil is the perfect partner: order three plants each of 'Sweet Genovese',

Greek, purple, 'Siam Queen' and lemon basil (£7.50) or buy both collections for £20 incl p&p. Call 01354 740553 quoting CL or visit [organicplants.co.uk](http://organicplants.co.uk) and quote CL0411. Offer ends 30 April; dispatch in early May.



## Pick of the vegetables

### THIS MONTH

#### Asparagus

**WHY?** Considered a king among vegetables, its short season from late April to early June makes it highly prized. The briefer the time lapse between asparagus being harvested and reaching your plate, the finer the flavour, so this is a vegetable that is always best home-grown.

**WHERE?** A good asparagus bed can be productive for ten years or more, so take the time to prepare it especially well in fertile soil in full sun.

**BEWARE** Asparagus hates competition so it is essential to keep the bed weed free. Control asparagus beetle by cutting down the foliage in autumn and burning it.

### Good as wood

*Timber usually works well in the garden, but wooden paths or decking can become slippery.*

*Millboard is a composite anti-slip alternative that looks just like wood (02476 305502; [millboarddecking.com](http://millboarddecking.com)). ▷*



**WHAT'S IN A NAME**  
**Aquilegia** comes from the Latin aquila, meaning an eagle. Its common English name, columbine, is from columba, the Latin for dove, as the flower spurs are thought to resemble drinking doves.

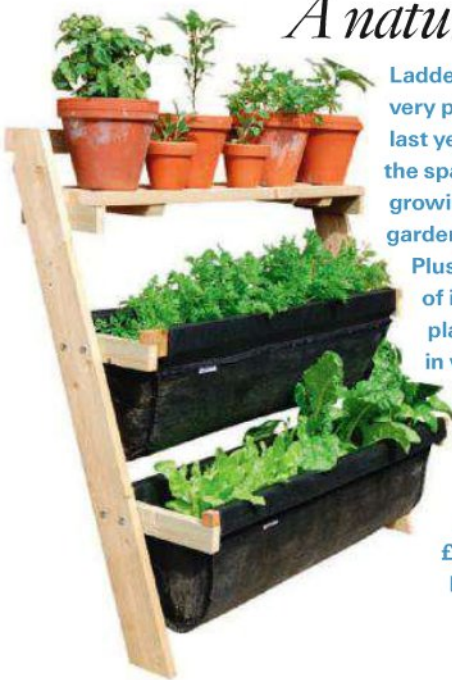




## Visit a glorious garden

Great Dixter in all its spring finery is an uplifting sight. Thanks to head gardener Fergus Garrett and his team, the place is as inspiring and exciting as it was when Christopher Lloyd was alive. In April, meadows are carpeted with narcissi, primroses, violets and snake's head fritillaries, borders are vivid with tulips blooming among emerging foliage and pots of the season's star performers cluster around the front porch. For details of opening times or to book a place on one of its April garden courses (Succession Planting in the Mixed Border on 11 April or Nursery Propagation Day on 18 April), call 01797 252878 or visit [greatdixter.co.uk](http://greatdixter.co.uk).

## A natural high



Ladder Allotments have proved very popular since their launch last year as a way of maximising the space for displaying flowers or growing vegetables in a small garden. The Ladder Allotment Plus has the added refinement of integral polypropylene planter bags, which are lighter in weight than containers, re-useable and retain enough water to produce healthy crops or flowers. Available in two-, three- and four-tier sizes, from £33.99 (01252 675054; [ladderallotments.com](http://ladderallotments.com)).

### WHAT TO DO IN

# April

**LIGHTLY TRIM** lavender and other silver-leaved herbs into neat mounds

**PLANT** maincrop potatoes and earth-up earlies

**SOW** leeks outdoors

**PLANT** maincrop carrots, peas and beetroot

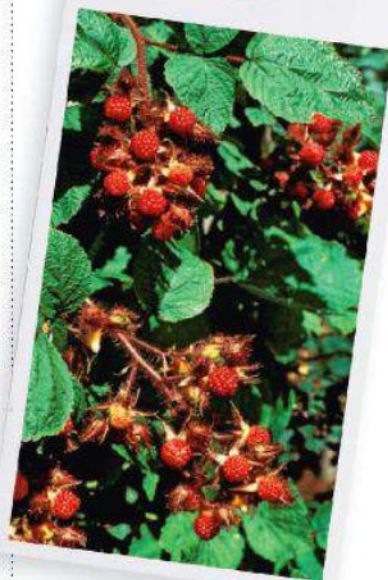
**START** successional sowing of herbs and salads

**PRICK OUT** and pot on seedlings to avoid crowding



## A floral flourish

*Emma Bridgewater has collaborated with Blueprint Collections on a range of stationery including pretty notebooks. Prices from £6 at Emma Bridgewater shops.*



## Plant offer

### A Japanese wineberry

As easy to grow as a raspberry, this delicious, unusual berry is a vigorous deciduous shrub that reaches 2.5m or 3m tall. Perfect for training against a fence, the canes grow one year and fruit the next. The small, conical, orange-red fruit ripen in early August and can be eaten fresh or cooked like raspberries. Buy one in a 9cm pot for £11.95 or two for £19.90, saving £4. Plants will be delivered within 28 days.

Orders should be sent to Country Living Japanese Wineberry Offer CL061, DT Brown Seeds, Rookery Farm, Joys Bank, Holbeach St Johns, Spalding PE12 8SG, with cheques payable to CL Gardens By Post. For MasterCard/Visa orders and enquiries, call 0870 950 5913 and quote Ref CL061. If you are not completely happy with your order, let us know within 14 days to arrange a replacement or full refund. 🐭

For horticultural tips and gardens to visit, see our website, [allaboutyou.com/countryliving](http://allaboutyou.com/countryliving)





## country living promotion

**1 Elodie Smock Dress** was £165 now £148.50; oversized linen smock, wide body and arms gathered into over stitched collar and cuffs, in Indigo or Ochre. **2 Naima Swing Jacket** was £155 now £139.50; shortish jacket with three-quarter sleeves in a soft, slubby, slightly iridescent two-tone linen twill. **3 Betty Scarf** was £49 now £44.10; fine checked scarf in very soft, crinkled cotton with tassled ends. **4 Jazz shoe** was £165 now £148.50; dainty, light lace-up in flexible canvas, with fine leather sole, in Denim and Old Silver on Natural.



# Fresh looks for a STYLISH SPRING

Bold coastal hues and a subtle blend of natural textures give Toast's covetable new collection a distinctive appeal

**T**aking its inspiration from the dramatic shades and textures of islands and coastlines, Toast's unique collection for spring 2011 features eclectic prints in flowing, easy-to-wear designs, as well as a range of striking monochrome pieces in contemporary graphic shapes. Layer sheeny cotton chambrays with cool open-weave linens, crinkled cotton gauze and soft slubby twills in an evocative natural palette of rich sandy ochres, inky marine blues, silvery granite greys and soft denim marls to create your own relaxed, individual look that will ensure you make a stylish statement this season.

## OFFER

Country Living readers will receive **10% off** the items featured in the attached small book with free delivery and free returns on every order. Simply visit the Toast website [toast.co.uk](http://toast.co.uk) and enter the special code **S11iCL** at the checkout, or call **0844 557 5200** and quote **S11iCL**. This offer ends on 30 April 2011.

● To view the full collection and find your nearest store, visit [toast.co.uk](http://toast.co.uk)

**TOAST**  
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# Ecoguide

Keen to be green? New ideas, products and advice *By Kitty Corrigan*



## Save the world

If the start of the new financial year, the VAT increase and train fare hikes have left you feeling that your money is disappearing into a black hole, don't despair. There is a way you can make a good investment and help the environment – by choosing an ethical savings plan. And if you have no spare cash to save, you will almost certainly have a company or personal pension. Do you know where your contributions go? Businesses are legally bound to disclose "the extent [if at all] to which social, environmental or ethical considerations are taken into account" in choosing their fund (Pension Act amendment 2000), but how many of us enquire? Find out more about ethical investment at [eiris.org.uk](http://eiris.org.uk) and consult your independent financial advisor to switch funds or set up a savings plan.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



## Eco chic

When choosing a carpet, it's good to find a company committed to using

British wool woven in the UK and to reducing its impact on the environment. Ulster Carpets has done this by investing in energy-efficient weaving and dyeing equipment, installing heat-recovery units and fitting low-energy lighting. More than

90 per cent of materials used are from renewable sources. The range includes Natural Choice, made from 100 per cent undyed pure wool; from £37/sq m for Wilton; visit [ulstercarpets.com](http://ulstercarpets.com).

## eco tip

Look out for the 'penguin approved' belu bio mineral water, the UK's first plastic bottle made from corn rather than petroleum and commercially compostable.

For more ideas on how to live a greener life, visit [allaboutyou.com/countryliving](http://allaboutyou.com/countryliving)

## DID YOU KNOW...?

Since the tax on small-scale biofuel use was dropped in July 2007, there has been a surge in the number of drivers converting diesel cars to run on used cooking oil from local restaurants.



## Travel light

● The award-winning walking company Upland Escapes specialises in mountain terrain in Europe and has come up with a checklist of tips to help your holiday leave the lightest possible footprint on the region you explore:

**REFILL** your water bottle from the village fountain instead of buying mineral water.

**SPEND** money in local shops and/or leave a donation at historical buildings or churches you visit.

**USE** local, fresh produce for your lunchbox and eat out in village restaurants.

**BE AWARE** of electricity



usage and always switch off lights before leaving your accommodation.

**RESPECT** native culture and traditions by supporting events and festivals in the area.

For more green tips, visit [uplandescapes.com](http://uplandescapes.com) or call 01865 315680.

● It's time to dust down the camping gear...or treat yourself to a 'glamping' break with Canopy & Stars, a new venture from Alastair Sawday. You don't even need a tent – you could sleep in a four-poster in a Cornish Iron Age roundhouse, a gypsy caravan in Scotland or a luxury log cabin in the Lake District. Call 01275 395447 or visit [canopyandstars.co.uk](http://canopyandstars.co.uk).



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## GRAPEVINE GOSSIP

We worked our way through the dessert wines and then the tasting session was over. Mr Addington was nudged awake in time to place a large order for alcohol-free wine as a welcome home present for Mrs Addington and stumble muzzily away arm-in-arm with Bob. But despite Colin's heroic attempts to educate our collective palate, and Julian's full order book, I can report only limited success. On the plus side, Kay's well of hypermarket plonk has finally run dry but Rachael still likes pink wine, although now she calls it 'rosé'; I remain a sucker for a funny label and I can't see Maurice passing up a bargain. And Mr Addington, although revelling in his new friendship with Bob, remains a committed teetotaler. 🍷



ILLUSTRATIONS BY CELIA WITCHARD





# *Step into* SPRING

April is when leaves burst forth from furled buds and the countryside receives its first flush of green. There's no more uplifting time for a walk in the woods, as birdsong fills the air and a carpet of bluebells and other wildflowers covers the ground, while the trees form a natural canopy overhead

STYLING BY HESTER PAGE | PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENT DARBY  
ASSISTED BY BEN KENDRICK AND CARL BRAGANZA





OPPOSITE PAGE Vintage **stool**, £36, Pimpernel & Partners. Blue enamel **mug**, £1.50, Baileys. Straw **hat**, £15, The Vintage Gardener. Rush **basket**, £45, Petersham Nurseries. **Cushion** with large indigo motif, from £55, Designers Guild. Other **cushions** in: Burma cotton blue, £146/m, Sister Parish at Tissus D'Hélène. Charlotte brown and pink floral cotton, £31/m, Elanbach. Deckchair Stripe powder blue cotton, £12/m, Clarke & Clarke. Roll-out Glamping **table** (in background), £300 (set with two stools), Garden Trading. **THIS PAGE** Galvanised **tub**, £24, Baileys. Blue and white **plate** and striped **fabric**, from a selection, Ralph Lauren. Vintage milk **bottles**, £12.50 each, Pedlars. Sprig linen **fabric sample** in seashore blue, £24.50/m, Sasha Waddell. Whitewashed vegetable **crate**, £28, Pimpernel & Partners ▸









*Find a sheltered, sunny spot and set up a table and chairs as an outdoor workspace, with comfortable cushions, a portable radio, nature books and some early spring flowers to pot up*

OPPOSITE PAGE From left Vintage wooden **crate**, £14.50, The Long Room. Selection of potted **alpines**, from £1.75 each, The Kew Gardener. Vintage orange metal **chair**, £90 (pair), Pimpernel & Partners. On chair **Cushion** in Hollyhock neutral cotton, £49.50/m, Anna French. Roll-out Glamping **table** and **stool**, £300 (set with two stools), Garden Trading. On **table**, from left Vintage galvanised **tub**, £24; **tea towel**, £7.50; green Thermos **flask**, £24; old **trowel**, £15; Duralux **glass**, £1.50; all Baileys. Milk **bottles** (in tub), £12.50 each, Pedlars. Roberts digital **radio**, £129.95, John Lewis. Terracotta **pots**, from £3.50 each, The Vintage Gardener. Vintage **tins**, from £12 each, The Long Room. Red ball of Heritage jute **twine**, £2, Nutscene. Vintage blue **chair**, from £45, The Long Room. On chair Vintage **books**, from £12.50 each, The Long Room. Vintage woollen Welsh checked **blanket**, £89, Jane Beck

Welsh Blankets. Vegetable **crate** (on stool), £28, Pimpernel & Partners. On washing line **Shirts**, from a selection, Gap. Stripe Strange Collar Tee **top**, £49, Cabbages & Roses. **Peg bag** in Zipper Stripe in blue on oyster linen-mix, £154/m, Bennison. Bamboo **ladder**, £55, Emily Readett-Bailey. ABOVE LEFT Gardening **gloves**, £10, Baileys. All other details, as before. ABOVE RIGHT **Tent** made from jute hessian, £3.79/lb, HobbyCraft; **border** in Portland Mood indigo striped cotton, £36.45/m, Olicana. Large **cushion** (in foreground) and **tent side** in Rambling Rose blue linen-mix, £49/m, Jane Churchill. Small **cushion** in Corner's Bay Floral indigo linen, £72/m, Ralph Lauren. **Book** and **print**, junk-shop finds. Straw **hat**, from a selection, Accessorize. RIGHT Vintage galvanised **bucket**, £15, Baileys. Vintage **books**, junk-shop finds. Ceramic rabbit **mug**, £15, Scandinavian Interiors ▷







Vintage wooden **awning frame** (with cover, not shown), from a selection, Baileys; **roof** and **sides** in Sofia linen-mix, £24/m, Harlequin; **back** in sand and blue stripe Mona cotton, from £20/m, Linum at Northlight; **left-side lower panel** in Antarctic Mood Indigo cotton, £39/m, Olicana. *From left* **Deckchair**, junk-shop find; **sling** in Portland Cornish Blue cotton, £39/m, Olicana. Vintage **hamper**, £35; **bucket**, £15; both Baileys. **Bag** in vintage floral fabric, £29, Decorative Country Living. Khaki **bag**, similar from Ally Capellino. **Carafe**, £13.95, Dee Puddy. Storm **lantern**, £29, Toast. Vintage **stool**, £34, Pimpernel & Partners. **Cushions** in (from left) Eden Roc Stripe linen-mix, £194/m; La Garoupe indigo linen, £158/m; Turkana Rug Stripe cotton, £69/m: all Ralph Lauren. Tied-top solid blue linen **cushion**, from £47, Odd. Red gingham **cushions**, from £26 each, Baileys. **Cushion** in Doveflight blue linen mix by Mark Hearld, £44/m, St Jude's. Ascot **hamper**, £24.95, Chairworks. **Handkerchief** in floral Tana Lawn, from a selection, Liberty. **OPPOSITE PAGE** Vintage glass lidded **jar**, £18, Baileys. **Cushion** in Rambling Rose linen-mix, £49/m, Jane Churchill. Wool-mix **rug** in Pine Forest, from £49, The Braided Rug Company. Vintage **books** and **prints**, junk-shop finds ▷









*Put up a tent in the woods or your garden and create a romantic escape. Take time to study nature close up – use reference and picture books and make lists of the species that visit*

TOP LEFT Faux driftwood console **table**, £80, Emily Readett-Bailey. Enamel **teapot**, £16; vintage green Thermos **flask**, £24; Durablex **glass**, £1.50; large blue-rimmed white enamel **plates**, £3.50 each; small matching enamel **plates**, £2.50 each; **teaspoon**, from a selection: all Baileys. **Cake**, from a selection: Bettys. Cream enamel 'Morning' **mug**, £14 (set of four), The Bell Tent Company. Striped **tea towel** in Antarctic Mood Indigo cotton, £39/m, Olicana. Vintage red **tin**, £20, The Long Room. TOP RIGHT Tent made from jute **hessian**, £3.79/lb, HobbyCraft; **border** in Portland Mood indigo striped cotton, £36.45/m, Olicana. **Back of tent** in plaid cotton, from a selection, Ian Sanderson. **Tea towels** (on top of tent) in Portland Mood indigo striped cotton, £36.45/m, Olicana; bordered with Rambling Rose blue linen-mix, £49/m, Jane Churchill. Large **cushions** and **tent sides** in

Rambling Rose blue linen-mix, £49/m, Jane Churchill. Straw **hat** (just seen), from a selection, Accessorize. Small **cushion** in Corner's Bay Floral indigo linen, £72/m, Ralph Lauren. Vintage glass lidded **jar** (containing flowers), £18, Baileys. Vintage botanical and bird **books** and **prints**, all junk-shop finds. Balls and spools of jute **twine**, from a selection, Nutscene. Straw **basket**, £35, Petersham Nurseries. LEFT Faux driftwood director's **chair**, £140; console **table**, £80: both Emily Readett-Bailey. Vintage galvanised florist's **bucket**, £15, Baileys. *On chair* Stripe Strange Collar Tee **top**, £49; **plimsolls**, from a selection: both Cabbages & Roses. **Cushion** in Brancha cobalt linen-mix, £37.73/m, Romo. *On table* Ceramic **mug** in Celadon, £15.50 (set of two), Sophie Conran for Portmeirion. Vintage dairy **jug**, £18; vintage glass, lidded **jar**: both Baileys. All other details, as before ▷





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Vintage galvanised buckets, £15 each, Baileys. **Wheelbarrow**, from £70, green **watering can**, £35: both The Vintage Gardener. **Cushions** (beside gate), in Sail Broad Stripe blue cotton, £36/m, Jane Churchill; and Burma blue cotton, £146/m, Sister Parish at Tissus D'Hélène. Cleft oak **gate**, £270, The Cleft Gate Company. Woven Guatemalan Fairtrade **baskets** (on gate), from £9 each, RE. **Scarf** (over gate), from a selection, Toast. For stockist details, see our *Where To Buy* page.

*If you go down to the woods today...* Britain's woodlands wake from their winter slumber this year to a reprieve. Plans to sell 258,000 hectares of government-owned forests – a fifth of all woodlands in England – have been scrapped. More than 500,000 people signed a petition opposing the proposed sell-off, forcing the Prime Minister to abandon the consultation over their future. Fears that the open access to these forests for walkers, horse riders and cyclists could be lost, that biodiversity may not be protected, that forests would be sub-divided, or even chopped down, prompted widespread condemnation. So there's never been a better time to enjoy a woodland walk – a new website, [visitwoods.org.uk](http://visitwoods.org.uk), can help you locate your nearest open-access woods, including those carpeted with bluebells. 🐾





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POETRY COMPETITION

# ODE *to the* COUNTRYSIDE



When we invited you to join us in celebrating the British countryside by penning a poem in its honour and taking part in our competition (CL November 2010), we didn't anticipate receiving more than 300 entries. Farm Crisis Network ([fcn.org.uk](http://fcn.org.uk)) is delighted with the funds raised from the entry fee – a staggering £3,110. “A magnificent contribution, thank you,” says Sarah Brown, chief executive of the charity which provides pastoral and practical support to farming people. “You’ve helped ensure that our network of volunteers can continue to assist families in need nationwide.” We hope you all enjoy the winning poem published over the page.



# EEL CATCHER

by FRANCES GREEN

*The last of his kind, although the eels live on  
at home in that buttered blackness*

*of Fenland lodes. He knows their progress –  
those tiny glass eels from the Sargasso*

*growing long and fat on slipways  
of East Anglian mud – as willows bud*

*dropping hives and griggs deep  
into new-mooned dankness*

*to catch them, maturing  
rising and sinking in their truce-time;*

*this slippery pause  
in a lifelong circumnavigation.*

*We should mark his endeavours,  
this marshland hero: who else*

*will gather these ancient dues  
to old kings, for new cathedrals –*

*payments writhing in wet sacks;  
history written in water.*



## THE WINNERS

To read all of the winning competition entries, visit [allaboutyou.com/poetry](http://allaboutyou.com/poetry).

● **FIRST PRIZE** Frances Green receives a complimentary place with accommodation on a weekend poetry writing and appreciation course at West Dean College in West Sussex ([westdean.org.uk](http://westdean.org.uk)).

● **SECOND PRIZE** Simone Mansell Broome wins second prize for her poem *Grave Digging* – a one-year subscription to creative writing

organisation the Arvon Foundation's Friends scheme as well as a selection of its publications worth more than £100 ([arvonfoundation.org](http://arvonfoundation.org)).

● **RUNNERS-UP** Due to the high quality of entries, our judging panel decided that not five but ten entries were worthy runners-up. Each receives a copy of *Country* (Conran Octopus, £50), a collaboration between CL photographer Andrew Montgomery and designer Jasper Conran. 🐾



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW MONTGOMERY  
CUT-OUT PHOTOGRAPHS BY STUDIO 33



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# *All set for* EASTER

*Create the perfect table for an Easter tea party with these easy handmade projects, taking the pretty pastel hues of early spring flowers as your inspiration*

STYLING AND WORDS BY NICOLA MARC | PHOTOGRAPHS BY VIRGINIA MACDONALD





## Seasonal patterns

Arrange papier-mâché eggs filled with mini chocolate eggs in a bowl to create an Easter centrepiece (below). Group together with handpainted hens' eggs decorated with ribbon bows.

To blow a fresh egg, first wash it, then use a sharp needle to prick a hole carefully at least 3mm in diameter at the top and bottom. Blow through one hole to force the raw egg out through the other – you'll find this easier if you break the yolk with the needle first.

Vintage **papier-mâché eggs**, from a selection, eBay. **Handpainted egg**, similar from Jane Means. **Ribbon**, from a selection, V V Rouleaux. Ceramic **bowl**, similar from Lauren Denney. **Tablecloth**, £32.99, LinenMe



## A glass act

A simple display of early forced bulbs such as these delicate grape hyacinths (opposite) strikes a joyful seasonal note.

Plant up an elegant mug or small pot with bulbs just coming into flower, and then place them under a glass cloche to accentuate their beauty. Water regularly to prevent them from drying out.

Embossed ceramic **mug**, £6.50, The Orchard. Glass **cloche**, £14.95, Summerill & Bishop. Storage **jar** with metal lid, £2.65, Ikea. Small metal **buckets** (painted with emulsion), from £3.25 each, Burford Garden Company. **Tablecloth**, £32.99, LinenMe

## Fragrant flourishes

Assemble a small posy of scented spring flowers and place in a glass hanging votive (above). Use the metal handle to attach it to the back of a chair with a decorative ribbon in a contrasting shade.

Alternatively, create a bolder display using larger spring blooms in vibrant colours (left) to brighten an entire room.

Glass **votive** with wire handle, £4, Garden Trading. **Ribbon**, from a selection, V V Rouleaux. Similar garden **chair**, £409.95 (pair), Primrose London ▷







## *All things bright and beautiful*

Stud a circular wreath-base of florist's Oasis with a colourful array of spring flowers for a glorious display. Start with the largest blooms, then fill in with smaller ones, covering the inner and outer edges to conceal the base. Hang from a ribbon and, if the wreath needs reviving, take it down on alternate days and immerse the base in water. Drain before re-hanging.

**Tablecloth**, £32.99, LinenMe. **Linen napkins**, from a selection, LinenMe. **Glass cake stand**, £40, John Lewis. **Jar**, £2.65, Ikea. **Vintage papier-mâché eggs**, from a selection, eBay. **Handpainted eggs**, similar from Jane Means. **China bowl**, similar from Lauren Denney. **Green plates**, similar from Richard Dale. **Glasses**, similar from Riedel. **Glass carafe**, £24.95, Forma. **Flower pots**, from garden centres; painted in Calamine estate emulsion, £29.50/2.5 litres, Farrow & Ball. **Wreath-base**, from £5, The Essentials Company. **Vintage plate** (on shelf), similar from Pimpernel & Partners





## Pail perfection

Introduce pretty pastel accents to a fresh white tablecloth with colourful accessories and a display of painted eggs. Children will have fun helping to make simple invitations for an Easter celebration. Fold a sheet of white card in two, write the wording with a silver or gold pen and stick a chick in one corner. Use small metal buckets painted in soft shades (below) to hold napkins and an arrangement of dyed eggs.

Zinc **buckets**, from £3.25 each, Burford Garden Company. Paper **napkins**, similar from £1.95 for 20, Dotcomgiftshop. Shredded **tissue paper**, from £1.65 (pack), Paperchase. Linen **tablecloth**, from £32.99, LinenMe. **Candles**, similar £1.60 for 24, Blue Ribbons



## Special delivery

This is the perfect time of year to create thoughtful personalised gifts for friends and family (as shown left). Handmade iced biscuits in Easter-themed shapes, such as chicks, eggs and bunnies (above), will always be well received. Separate them carefully with layers of greaseproof paper, then box them up and wrap in plain brown paper. Add ribbon and faux flowers for a decorative finishing touch.

Wicker **basket**, £10.95, Marquis & Dawe. **Ribbon** and fabric **flower**, from a selection, V V Rouleaux. Brown **paper**, from a selection, Paperchase.

## Twiggy treats

Spring branches in bud make a delightful display on their own, but look striking adorned with homemade Easter biscuits hung from colourful satin ribbons.

Arrange branches from flowering shrubs in a large glass jar filled with stones and a little water. Place inside a metal bucket that has been painted and stencilled with a floral motif. Fill the top of the pail with coloured, shredded paper to hide the jar.

**Table**, similar unpainted from £119, Scumble Goosie. **Bucket**, £3.25, Burford Garden Company. **Stencils**, from £5.95, The Stencil Library. **Biscuit cutters**, from a selection, Jane Asher. **Jars**, similar from, eBay. **Cushion**, similar from Debenhams ▷





## Exquisite Easter keepsakes

These beautiful decoupage eggs will last longer than the chocolate variety, which disappear all too quickly on Easter Day. Arranged on a pretty plate, or hung from ribbons on blossom-covered twigs, they make an appealing spring display. Those shown here were made using polystyrene eggs from a craft shop for the base, but you could use blown fresh eggs instead.

- 1 Cut strips of thin white paper 1cm wide and approximately 7.5cm in length.
- 2 Put glue on one side of each strip and, starting at the bottom, stick it carefully along the length of the egg, finishing at

the bottom. Repeat with the other strips, overlapping each one slightly until you have completely covered the egg.

3 Cut out flowers, leaves or other motifs from sheets of patterned paper. A pretty flocked paper from a craft shop has been used here, but scraps cut from ordinary wrapping paper would work as well.

4 Stick down the flowers and leaves on the egg. Instead of covering the egg with white paper first, you could cut strips from the patterned paper and use these to cover the egg to create an overall design. All materials, from a selection, HobbyCraft. For stockists, see our *Where to Buy* page 🐣

### BOOK OFFER

This project is one of many to be found in *Papercrafting In No Time* by Clare Youngs (Cico Books, £14.99)\*. *Country Living* readers can order a copy for the special price of £11.99 with free p&p: call 0871 803 6764 or visit [allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk](http://allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk).





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# BEYOND the PALE

*Relaxing and easy to live with, off-white colour schemes are a stylish choice for country homes. Discover how to use them successfully by layering chalky pastels and understated neutrals to create warmth and interest in every room*

WORDS BY ATLANTA BARTLETT AND DAVE COOTE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY POLLY WREFORD







## TEXTURES

Make a pale room interesting by introducing varied textures, combining glossy with matt and rough with smooth. Aim for a contrast between floors and walls, furniture and accessories.

OPPOSITE PAGE A mix of materials from canvas sails to distressed woodwork and weathered fossils add detail to this all-white scheme. THIS PICTURE Rough stone walls and limestone flooring are offset by a contemporary metal table to give depth to a palette of cream, white and grey. TOP LEFT Papery petals bring a fragile beauty to a still-life display

## SOURCEBOOK

- Scandinavian furniture and homeware: Tine K Home ([tinekhome.dk](http://tinekhome.dk)) ✉.
- Rustic cottons and linens: Beyond France (01285 641867; [beyondfrance.co.uk](http://beyondfrance.co.uk)) ✉.
- Antique and vintage boats: Paul Drewett (07890 970855; [model-yachts.co.uk](http://model-yachts.co.uk)) ▷



## SHADES of DIFFERENCE

Paint walls in chalky pastel pinks, greys or greens and balance with white furnishings to create a calm effect. Using colour in this way brings warmth but the effect is still soft and subtle.

**THIS PICTURE** A gentle shade of grey softens a sparse arrangement of antiques, while white-painted floorboards give a clean, up-to-date finish. **OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT** White accents, bare floorboards and a collection of mismatched china prevent this pretty pink dining room from feeling twee. **MAIN PICTURE** Use a delicate pink hue to accentuate the elegant shapes of creamware china

### SOURCEBOOK:

- Antique china: The Dining Room Shop (020 8878 1020; [thediningroomshop.co.uk](http://thediningroomshop.co.uk)) ☒.
- Furniture and home accessories: The White Company (0845 678 8150; [thewhitecompany.com](http://thewhitecompany.com)) ☒.
- Antiques and accessories: Pale & Interesting (01797 344077; [paleandinteresting.com](http://paleandinteresting.com)) ☒.
- Painted furniture: Pimpernel & Partners (020 7731 2448; [pimpernelandpartners.co.uk](http://pimpernelandpartners.co.uk)) ☒ ▷













## SPLASHES of COLOUR

With a neutral scheme, you can inject colour easily, from gentle pastels to vibrant shades. Off-whites are so versatile that you can ring the changes without completely re-painting.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT A powder-blue range cooker provides a burst of colour in this contemporary kitchen. MAIN PICTURE Mismatched chairs in different upbeat shades and a collection of blue-and-white Cornishware and pastel vintage china combine with bare boards and pale walls in this practical kitchen, creating a feeling of friendly informality. THIS PAGE A claw-footed cast-iron bathtub, painted a soothing blue, draws the eye in this tranquil, wooden-clad bathroom

### SOURCEBOOK:

- Traditional Cornishware china: TG Green (020 8874 6546; [tggreen.co.uk](http://tggreen.co.uk)) ☒.
- Industrial vintage furniture and home accessories: Baileys (01989 561931; [baileyshomeandgarden.com](http://baileyshomeandgarden.com)) ☒.
- Vintage painted and re-painted furniture: The Shabby Barn (01953 681075; [theshabbybarn.co.uk](http://theshabbybarn.co.uk)) ☒.
- Roll-top bath: Aston Matthews (020 7226 7220; [astonmatthews.co.uk](http://astonmatthews.co.uk)) ☒ ▷





## TONES of WHITE

Bright whites can appear harsh in country homes. Use warmer shades of off-white instead, which work well with organic materials such as beams, stone, wooden floors and textured fabrics.

A delicate palette of grey and off-white lends this living room an air of calm elegance. The addition of warm tones in the guise of a rustic wooden bench and turned bowls ensures that this pale room is also cosy and inviting >







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**THIS PICTURE** Three different shades of white that share the same pinkish undertones have been combined to stylish effect in this relaxed home office. **TOP RIGHT** A cosy retreat that doubles as a guest room has been painted in a warm grey shade with just the window, salvaged from a reclamation yard, highlighted in off-white

**SOURCEBOOK:**

- Heritage paints: Farrow & Ball (01202 876141; farrow-ball.com) ✉
- Finely graded off-white paints: Little Greene (0845 880 5855; littlegreene.com) ✉
- Painted furniture: Sasha Waddell Furniture (020 8979 9189; sashawaddell.co.uk) ✉



**BOOK OFFER**

Adapted from *Pale & Interesting* by Atlanta Bartlett & Dave Coote (Ryland Peters & Small, £19.99). CL readers can order a copy for £14.99 incl p&p: call 0871 803 6764 or visit [allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk](http://allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk). 📖





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# FRESH *from* *the* FIELDS

*At an award-winning restaurant-with-rooms in the Devon countryside, virtually the entire menu is sown, grown, raised and gathered from its owners' organic farm*

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER | PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER







*"The only way we  
could be sure of  
serving meat from  
animals that had been  
treated well from  
start to finish was by  
having our own"*



Not many chefs end service by swapping their whites for a pair of wellies, but like her restaurant-with-rooms, Percy's Country Hotel in Virginstow, Devon, Tina Bricknell-Webb is unique. "I'm a stickler for quality," says Tina, who sources nearly all her ingredients from the 130 acres she farms organically with husband Tony. "By rearing livestock and growing crops, I'm certain we're serving the best seasonal and organic food." Raised beds, filled with leafy chard and beetroot, bright yellow courgette flowers and potatoes, surround the restaurant. Even the lavender that borders the old granary barn, where guests stay in Percy's seven bedrooms, is a common feature in Tina's baking and desserts. Across the farmyard, snowy-feathered geese stalk a shady field, while next door a lop-eared sow rests in her straw-filled ark feeding her piglets.

"Obviously, there are certain things we can't produce," Tina says, "but we try to keep our food miles as low as possible." So Tony is up at 4am each morning to head down to the daily fish markets at Looe, and pheasant and venison come from nearby shoots. More often than not, however, everything on Percy's menu, from the wild girolles to the lamb, has been sown, grown, raised and gathered a stone's throw from the kitchen door.

Each morning, once guests have feasted on breakfast, which includes poached eggs with home-cured ham and herb omelette, Tina visits her livestock before tackling the long to-do list that keeps the farm ticking over. First on today's rounds are two young pigs whose huge triangular ears almost touch the tips of their snouts as they snuffle and root around their pen, too small to join the rest of the 40-strong herd of rare breed Large Blacks foraging in the woodland. Nevertheless, they seem content, flopping onto their backs for tummy rubs from passers-by. And Percy's visitors are free to oblige – not only can they be sure that the meat on their plate comes from animals that have had healthy and happy lives, but they are also welcome to nip out and see it for themselves. "We like guests to become involved; they can climb in with the animals – some even request to be woken during lambing season to see the newborns," Tina says.

Fifteen years ago, the Bricknell-Webbs rarely got to see this way of life either. Having sold their chain of betting shops, they were running a wine bar in London's North Harrow but had bought a rundown farm in Devon with the intention of one day retiring there and renovating it into holiday lets. When the wine bar began winning awards for its food, however, they decided to make the move, refurbish the farm and opened it as a restaurant-with-rooms. Since then, Tina has been a finalist on ITV's *Chef of the Year* and her lamb was voted Best Organic Product by Taste of the West. An impressive CV, but particularly for one who never intended to become a chef – or a smallholder for that matter.

"I've always loved food, and have worked in private kitchens before, but it was only when I was thrown in at the deep end that I realised I could cook myself," says Tina, referring to the fateful night in North Harrow when her chef walked out in the middle of service. "His jacket was too small for me but it fitted Tina so she had a go," Tony says. Surprisingly, running betting shops turned out to be fantastic training for juggling tasks in the kitchen. "It just came naturally," Tina says. Similarly, it wasn't a passion for farming that prompted the Bricknell-Webbs to start ▷

**FROM TOP** Putting the finishing touches to the tables; home-grown vegetables are picked just two hours before serving; a flock of geese roams the fields; Tina's pickles and sauces





# Visit the CL Pavilion at the MALVERN SPRING GARDENING SHOW

**S**et at the foot of the beautiful Malvern Hills, the Malvern Spring Gardening Show in Worcestershire is one of Britain's most exciting horticultural events. Bursting with stylish gardens and displays, it's the perfect place to pick up ideas. Don't forget to visit the new *Country Living* Magazine Pavilion, opposite the members' enclosure, where you will find a range of exhibitors showcasing the best in British arts and crafts.

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- **Marvel** at the Eco Home and Garden area and see films at the Sol Cinema run by renewable energy.
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- **Pick up** top gardening tips from celebrity speakers including James Alexander-Sinclair, Joe Swift, Matthew Wilson and Chris Beardshaw.



DAY(S)	TIMES	PRICE ON THE DOOR	CL READER PRICE
Thursday 12 May	9am - 6pm	N/A	£27
Friday 13 May	9am - 6pm	£19.50	£17
Saturday 14 & Sunday 15 May	9am - 6pm	£16.50	£14

To book tickets, call **01684 584924** or visit [threecounties.co.uk/springgardening](http://threecounties.co.uk/springgardening)





FROM TOP The pigs are free to forage in the woodland; Tina specialises in seasonal dishes and is involved in every stage of the cooking; the farm offers great food in beautiful surroundings



*"What is most important to me is that everything I serve is fresh and has integrity. I plan my menu around the vegetable patch"*



raising their own animals. "I received one really bad meat order from a very reputable supplier. From then on, I realised the only way we could be sure it was from animals that had been properly treated from start to finish was by having our own."

Tina's 300-strong flock of sheep comprises Jacob, Suffolk and Texel crosses as well as the Zwartbles that are kept for their milk. This morning, she is checking for lameness which in the current warm damp weather is relatively common but easy to treat. Sophie, the couple's sheep dog, gamely begins to circle the animals around her mistress, herding any strays back into the mass of mink, black and white. It seems that Polly has given the field the slip and is grazing on the other side of the fence. "I don't usually name my sheep, but she's rather special," explains Tina as she spots the stray ewe whose white face is staring dolefully back through the gate at her as she scatters nuts among the rest of the flock. "I put 22 ewes with a ram who must have had a genetic problem because many of the lambs were born with umbilical hernias. I was out here at four in the morning stitching them up. Just four survived, and Polly was one of them."

When the Bricknell-Webbs feel the strain, recollections of their former lives help them carry on. "I can remember watching Metropolitan line trains reflected in our mirrored wardrobe in London. Now look what we have," Tina says, gesturing to the horizon that runs from Bodmin Moor in the west, Exmoor in the north and Dartmoor in the south. Tina and Tony are the only two full-time employees at Percy's, so WWOOFers (members of World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, who exchange their labour for bed and board – see below) are invaluable. "We certainly couldn't do it without them," says Tina.

The Percy's recipe is obviously a winner. Rated a rare nine out of ten by restaurant critic Giles Coren, Tina's cooking receives recognition beyond the novelty of its next-to-no food miles. "What is most important to me is that everything I serve is fresh and has integrity," Tina says. "I plan my menu around the vegetable patch and believe that if you rear animals naturally, they'll grow up to be happy and make for tasty meat. Our philosophy is pretty simple: If they have a good life, you'll have a good dinner." 🐾

Percy's Country Hotel, Virginstow, Devon (01409 211236; [percys.co.uk](http://percys.co.uk)). Dinner, bed and breakfast costs from £115 per person.

CL readers can order Percy's Cookbook by Tina Bricknell-Webb (Merlin Unwin Books, £20) for the special price of £16.99 with free p&p by calling 0871 803 6764 or visiting [allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk](http://allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk).

#### DOWN ON THE FARM

World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. In 1971, founder Sue Coppard arranged to help out a farmer in exchange for food and accommodation on a weekend escape to the countryside. Little did she know her interest in organic farming and the urge for a rural retreat would inspire a network connecting farmers and volunteers around the world – there are now nearly 450 sites in the UK and 6,000 internationally. To sign up, visit [wwwoof.org.uk](http://wwwoof.org.uk). *Christian Moseby*



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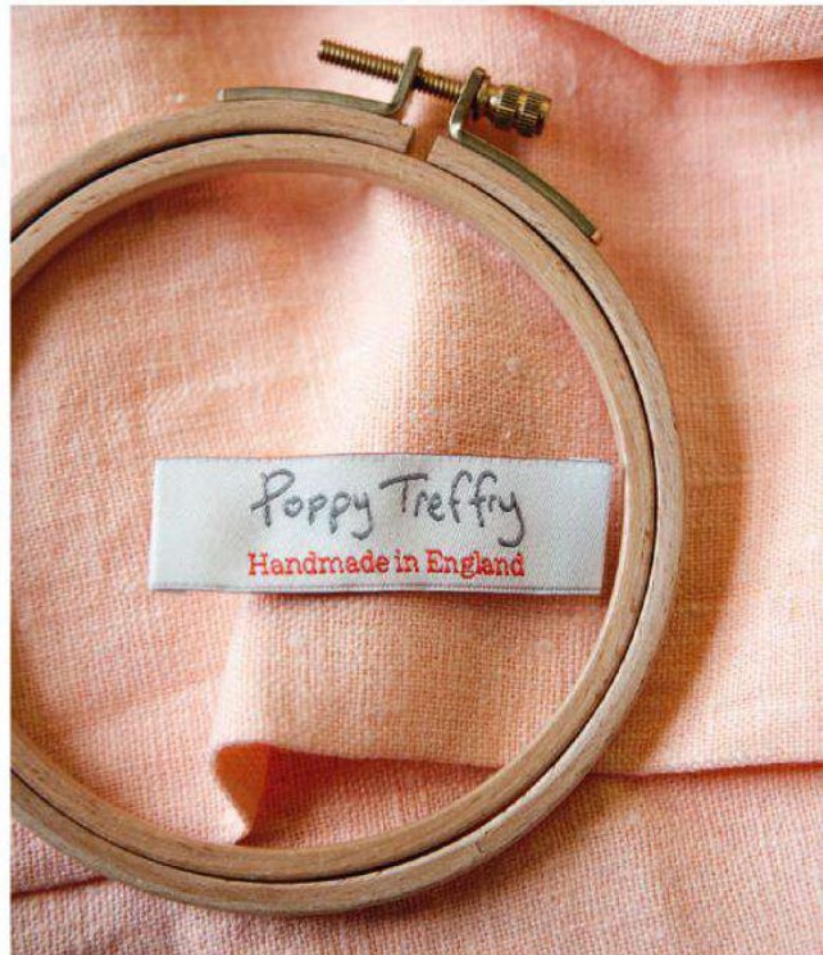
# *Material* TREASURES

*In a studio overlooking Newlyn Harbour  
on the Cornish coast, Poppy Treffry and  
her team create a homespun, hand-stitched  
range of accessories with embroidered images  
inspired by their surroundings*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA EDWARDS  
WORDS BY LISA BUCKLAND







Poppy Treffry (second from left and top right) with her fellow stitchers







*Poppy crafts her tea cosies,  
cushions and accessories on a  
1930s Singer sewing machine  
– a gift from her grandfather*

thread: the beginnings of a classic Poppy Treffry textile hot off the machine.

Homely and light-hearted, her tea cosies are embroidered with slogans such as 'Make tea not war' and are there to be used, not just admired. Tea cosies are her accidental bestseller as she made her first only because her father asked her for one. Teacups, Scottie dogs and fairy cakes are regular motifs, along with appliqué images of fishing boats strung with orange buoys and the quaint rooftops of St Ives.

It's unsurprising that Poppy's beautiful surroundings inspire her textiles as Cornwall is in her blood. Born to an artisan-builder father and a mother who spun and dyed her own yarns, Poppy grew up in Bodmin on a self-sufficient farm and had been taught to knit by the age of four. She sources her fabrics from local haberdashers and seeks out second-hand material from car boot fairs and attic sales, which she turns into a 100 per cent recycled range designed for The Eden Project. She keeps her favourite vintage finds in a sunshine-yellow Havana cigar box. Inside are remnants of a silk scarf that belonged to her grandmother, labels and 'selvedge': the self-finished labelled edges of fabric she uses to add a graphic element to her bags, cosies and cushions.

Poppy now supplies more than 200 shops in the UK and Japan, including Selfridges and Fortnum & Mason, but the road to success wasn't without its potholes. Back in 2003, and recently returned to Bodmin from a stint as an overseas volunteer at a handicraft cooperative in Central America, she was broke and wondering how she could make a living from a Fashion and Textiles degree gained at the Winchester School of Art. She had already tried her hand at making bags – small embroidered totes – before she left, but had been too timid to sell them. She set to work again, this time in a small bedroom at her father's house, using an old door placed on the bed as a cutting table. "It was far from ideal," Poppy says. "My sewing machine ▷

Poppy Treffry is busy at an old Singer sewing machine that purrs and thrums in the corner of her workshop like a vintage Rolls-Royce. Among the chandlers and fish packers on the quayside, a room above an old pilchard canning factory is an unlikely place for a textile design company but Poppy, who grew up in Cornwall, looks very much at home.

Hanging on the whitewashed brick walls are samples of Poppy's embroidered and appliqué bags and postcards. Behind her are roll on roll of sumptuous fabrics and stacked piles of neatly folded cottons and cords patterned with stripes, dots and dainty florals. On a cutting table in the centre of the room is a stack of semi-circles made from stripy blue ticking, ready to be stitched and sewn into tea cosies.

Poppy crafts her distinctive accessories, flouncy bags and cushions on a 1930s

Singer given to her ten years ago by her grandfather, who found it gathering dust in a local recycling centre. She prefers it to more modern machines because its simple engineering suits the style of freehand embroidery that has become her trademark. "It's so straightforward," she says. "It's basically a bobbin, tension dial and needle."

Poppy perches at the Singer to demonstrate, clasp a piece of duck-egg-blue fabric between two circular wooden hoops. Placing the fabric beneath the needle, lightly touching her foot on the pedal makes the machine whine, before it springs to life and the needle rapidly darts up and down through the fabric. Manoeuvring the hoop this way and that, she deftly 'writes' her name in looping black-thread letters. Pausing to position an appliqué disc of spotted red, she stitches twice round the perimeter and snips the

ABOVE Sara packs up pieces surrounded by work in progress and piles of folded cottons, patterned with stripes, dots and florals



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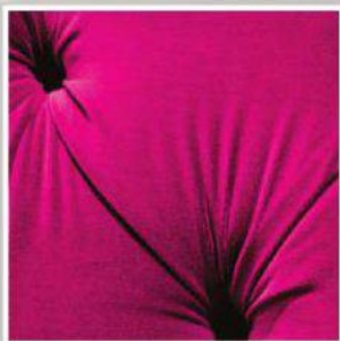
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**University of Brighton**







ABOVE FROM LEFT Positioning appliqué pieces to create a new design; Scottie dogs, fairy cakes and fishing boats are regular motifs

kept shorting out the electrics and eventually Dad got fed up with me."

A friend gave Poppy a place to stay and spotting the commercial potential in her bags, took samples to galleries in nearby Marazion. She sold 20 at the first attempt. An eagle-eyed crafts development officer from the local council happened to see one on sale and got in touch. "She told me exactly what to do – find premises, write a business plan and apply for funding. If it wasn't for her, there wouldn't be a business."

Within the week, Poppy had found a tiny attic space in Newlyn, not dissimilar to where she is now, above a fish-packing warehouse. "To get to work, I would have to step over crates of fish, climb up a ladder and through a trap door!" she says. Subsidising her business with a part-time job as an arts officer and a £1,000 loan from the Prince's Trust, Poppy focused her mind on producing a homespun range of hand-stitched bags and fabric kitchenware. Stands at the Harrogate Trade Fair and London's Top Drawer followed and in less than two years, Poppy's order book had swelled to such a size that it was time to take on staff and move to a larger premises.

Today she employs five local women: Melissa and Briony who stitch and embroider, Freya who finishes the pieces, Sara in packing and dispatching and Poppy's younger sister Faye, who organises

the sales and marketing. In November last year, Poppy opened her first shop in St Ives, long a destination for painters and artists. She painted it in her favourite "fish-and-chip-shop colours" of ruby-red and duck-egg blue and furnished it with a reclaimed haberdashery bench. As if that wasn't enough to keep her busy, a new range of leather purses, key rings and passport holders is in the pipeline to go on sale later this year.

Living in remote Cornwall can have its downsides. "I get the odd supplier who will ask me to come in the next day and I'll have to say no." The old buildings can be leaky and draughty in winter, and fingers get cold and calloused from the cutting – as testified by the protective gaffer tape bandaging Poppy and Sara's fingers. On hot days in summer, the odour of filleted

fish can get a little high yet Poppy says she wouldn't swap it for a life elsewhere. After all, it is here in Newlyn that she met her partner Justin Duance – he happened to be sharing her first attic studio – and they have a two-year-old daughter, Biba. Justin now works next door, crafting unique gold and silver wedding rings and pendants using wood salvaged from ship's timber. Owning a home just up the road in Penzance means Poppy's daily commute to work is on an ancient bike complete with a wicker basket on the handlebars.

"You cycle in on a beautiful day and think how lucky you are," Poppy says. "I am proof that you can live at the end of the earth and still make a living." 🐟 Poppy Treffry (01736 795494; [poppytreffry.co.uk](http://poppytreffry.co.uk)). Visit her shop at Drill Hall, Chapel Street, St Ives, Cornwall.

**CL READER OFFERS** This month, Poppy will send readers a free Oystercatcher tea towel when they spend £35 or more on her website. Visit [poppytreffry.co.uk](http://poppytreffry.co.uk) and use code CLOC, or call 01736 795494. You can also buy Poppy's book *Free & Easy Stitch Style: Go Freestyle with Machine Embroidery for Uniquely Creative Motifs, Patterns and Projects* (David & Charles, £14.99) for the special price of £12.99 at [allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk](http://allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk). Or go on a 'Sewing with Poppy Treffry' course (18-20 November 2011) to learn the art of pattern cutting, needlecraft and stitching to create a bag, tea cosy or cushion. From £264 per person for a two-night break at the Bedruthan Hotel, Cornwall, including dinner each evening. For details call 01637 860860 or visit [bedruthan.com/breaks](http://bedruthan.com/breaks).



Photographie: Beate Hansen © 2010, Model: Anastassija, Bath robe by Christian Fischbacher, Dreampure and Underwear by Bodas



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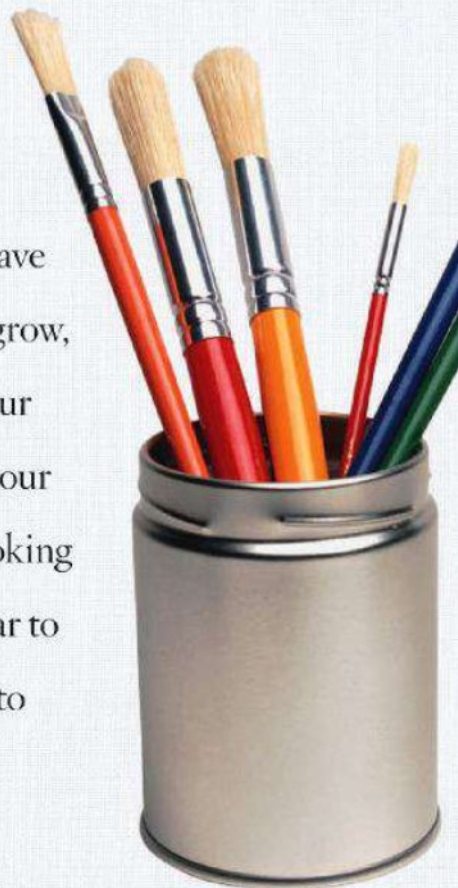
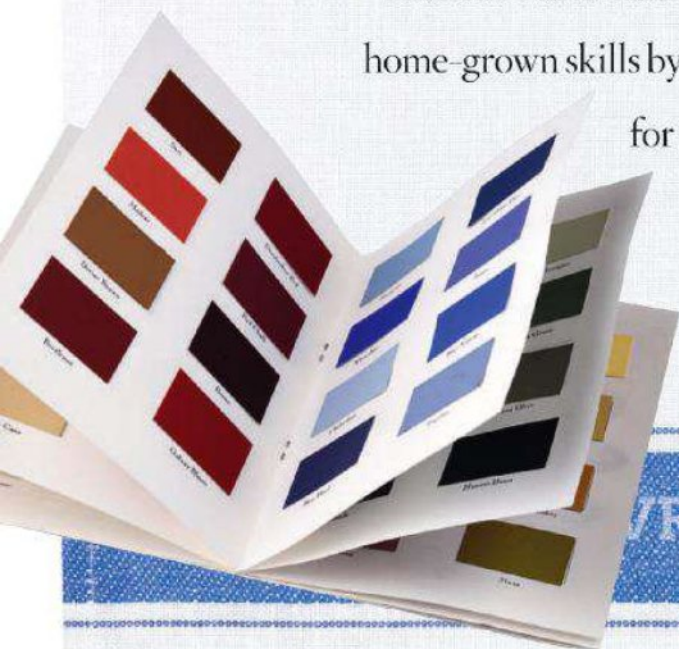


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# THE Kitchen Table TALENT AWARDS

We've always known that *Country Living* readers have got *talent* and now's your chance to prove it! If you can grow, sew or cook, write, draw or make, then you can enter our Kitchen Table Talent Awards. We want to *celebrate* your home-grown skills by recognising the best. We're also looking for the Kitchen Table Talent of the Year to help turn their *natural gift* into a successful business.



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## How to enter

The only criteria is that your talent is not currently your main source of income. There's a £5 fee per entry, which goes to our charity of the year – The Prince's Countryside Fund ([princescountrysidefund.org.uk](http://princescountrysidefund.org.uk)). Your entry should be accompanied by a maximum of 500 words (typed) about your particular passion and dreams for the future. You may enter more than one category. Please also tell us whether you'd like to turn your talent into a business; if so you'll be entered into the Kitchen Table Talent of the Year category. Download the entry form at [allaboutyou.com/talent](http://allaboutyou.com/talent). Closing date 3 June 2011.



## Tell us about your talent

### BEST CRAFTSPERSON

Do you love to make things? If you sew, stitch, knit, crochet, dye or have a talent for any type of craft, send us photos of up to three things you have made, with instructions.

**WIN!** A five-day craft course at West Dean College ([westdean.org.uk](http://westdean.org.uk)) and £100 of Homecrafts vouchers ([homecrafts.co.uk](http://homecrafts.co.uk))

### BEST COOK

Are your cakes and biscuits the best? Are your pies and puddings legendary? Send us your own recipe, plus good-quality photos of what you have made and explain why it has the X factor. Our Food Editor will test the recipes.

**WIN!** A Daylesford cookery course ([daylesfordorganic.com](http://daylesfordorganic.com)) and £100 of Lakeland kitchenware vouchers ([lakeland.co.uk](http://lakeland.co.uk))

### BEST GARDENER

Whether you're a kitchen gardener or more interested in ornamental schemes, show us your horticultural know-how with a planting plan and garden design

that you have brought to life. Send us good-quality photos of the finished garden and any plans and planting lists. **WIN!** A place on an RHS horticultural day course ([rhs.org.uk](http://rhs.org.uk)) and £100 of Crocus gardening vouchers ([crocus.co.uk](http://crocus.co.uk))

### BEST HOME DESIGNER

Whether you've renovated and designed a whole house or just transformed one room, it is time to show off your styling talent. Send photos of the project (before and after, if possible) and a mood board. **WIN!** A KLC interior design course ([klc.co.uk](http://klc.co.uk)) and £100 of B&Q vouchers ([diy.com](http://diy.com)).

### BEST WRITER

If you pen poetry, or write short stories or articles, send us an example of your work. A maximum of three pieces and no complete books, please.

**WIN!** A place on an Arvon Foundation ([arvonfoundation.org](http://arvonfoundation.org)) writing course and £100 of Staples home-office vouchers ([staples.co.uk](http://staples.co.uk))

### BEST ARTIST

Sculpture, sketching, painting or photography – we'd love to see examples of your art. Send us good-quality photos of up to three pieces and describe the

inspiration behind them.

Judges will ask to see shortlisted work. **WIN!** An introduction to a leading gallery ([lemonstreetgallery.co.uk](http://lemonstreetgallery.co.uk)), and £100 of vouchers for Winsor & Newton art materials ([winsornewton.com](http://winsornewton.com))

**ALL CATEGORY WINNERS** will receive a Blackberry Torch ([uk.blackberry.com](http://uk.blackberry.com))

### THE KITCHEN TABLE TALENT OF THE YEAR

The judges will select one person whose talent will make the transition from pastime to full-time. We'll be following their progress online and in the magazine. **WIN!** A year's mentoring package ([enterprisenation.com](http://enterprisenation.com)), a working lunch with a business angel and a free business Start-Up Kit, plus a Blackberry Torch and Blackberry Playbook ([uk.blackberry.com](http://uk.blackberry.com)). ▷

### WIN A START-UP KIT!

The first five entries picked out of the hat on 3 June 2011 will receive The Start-Up Kit for small businesses (worth £25) by Emma Jones, which contains more than £400-worth of offers.



## Who's got talent?

Meet four inspiring people who identified their natural skills, nurtured their different passions over the years and now earn a living from doing something they love



### THE HOUSEHOLD NAME

Amazingly, Emma Bridgewater had no formal training as a ceramicist and began making her now signature spongeware using a second-hand kiln in the bathroom, following her sketched-out designs for shapes and patterns. But her talent also lay in recognising that to succeed as a business she couldn't make each piece entirely by hand.

Emma sought out an ailing factory in The Potteries which had the expertise and equipment she needed. We're delighted that she will be joining our judging panel.



### THE CL STAFF MEMBER

An untapped interest in design and "a good eye" helped CL Home Design Editor Ben Kendrick secure his first job. Despite a career spent styling shoots and creating the beautiful images you see in the pages of CL, he claims not to be an expert. "But doing up the houses I've lived in and researching articles for the magazine have given me the confidence to turn my hand to most projects. I wouldn't dream of getting someone in to strip a floor, for example. My sewing skills are basic but I tackle blinds, loose covers and curtains." Ben was recently asked by HobbyCraft to design a cushion (above) as part of a hall of fame of design editors. Find the instructions to make it in the HobbyCraft in-store magazine.

### THE CL READER

Four years ago, Sue Simkins read our *Turn your Hobby into a Business* booklet, then promptly announced to her husband that she was going to compile a cookery book. She developed her talent for home cooking and baking by gaining a better understanding of the chemistry that takes place when cakes rise, for example, and created her own recipes from scratch. Her first book, *Cooking with Mrs Simkins* (Spring Hill, £12.99), was described as 'Cath Kidston meets Mrs Beeton' and she is now the family food columnist for the *Blackmore Vale Magazine* in Dorset where she lives. Her second book, *Tea with Mrs Simkins*, was published in October last year, while her latest, *Cakes from the Tooth Fairy*, is a collection of sugar-free baking recipes.

### DISCOVER YOUR TALENT

If you haven't yet worked out where your natural gifts lie, take our free self-tests at [allaboutyou.com/talent](http://allaboutyou.com/talent), where you will also find a wealth of practical advice and tips on how to turn your hobby or skill into an income. And for inspiration, read the booklet, free with this issue of *Country Living*, which lists 50 kitchen table talents and ways to make the most of them.





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#### THE CL COLUMNIST

Janey Wilks, who writes Tales from a Stone Cottage each month in CL under the name Aly Wilks, grew up in the countryside but married an army officer and her many house moves left little time for her love of writing. Then she came across a copy of CL in which Editor Susy Smith's invitation to readers to "become our new columnist... we want to hear about your life in the country" made her realise she could write about her new life and village in Wiltshire. Her blog beat 300 other entrants and the piece that became her opening column was both original and funny. Thanks to her column she has been commissioned to write several books including *Really Rural* (David & Charles, £9.99), a compendium of characters and customs even more eccentric than those in her village.

#### BID IN OUR CELEBRITY CRAFT AUCTION

As part of our celebration of talent we are holding a celebrity craft auction on eBay, which will be showcased at the *Country Living* Spring Fair (23-27 March 2011). One-off pieces, created specifically for CL, from some of Britain's best talents, will be on display at the Fair and you can bid for them online at [ebay.co.uk](http://ebay.co.uk) from 23 March 2011 (if you are not already registered with eBay, you will need to do so before you can bid). All the proceeds will go to our charity of the year, The Prince's Countryside Fund ([princescountrysidefund.co.uk](http://princescountrysidefund.co.uk)). The items are products or experiences from celebrities including Cath Kidston (below left), Jan Constantine (below right\*) Sophie Conran and Sarah Raven, and fashion company Toast (right). Preview the full auction catalogue at [allaboutyou.com/talent](http://allaboutyou.com/talent) and follow the auction at [twitter.com/countrylivinguk](http://twitter.com/countrylivinguk).



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# Pints of perfection

*Producing top-quality milk from traditional herds grazed on plant-rich pastures, a new breed of small-scale dairy is offering a refreshing alternative to intensive farming*

WORDS BY CATHERINE HUGHES





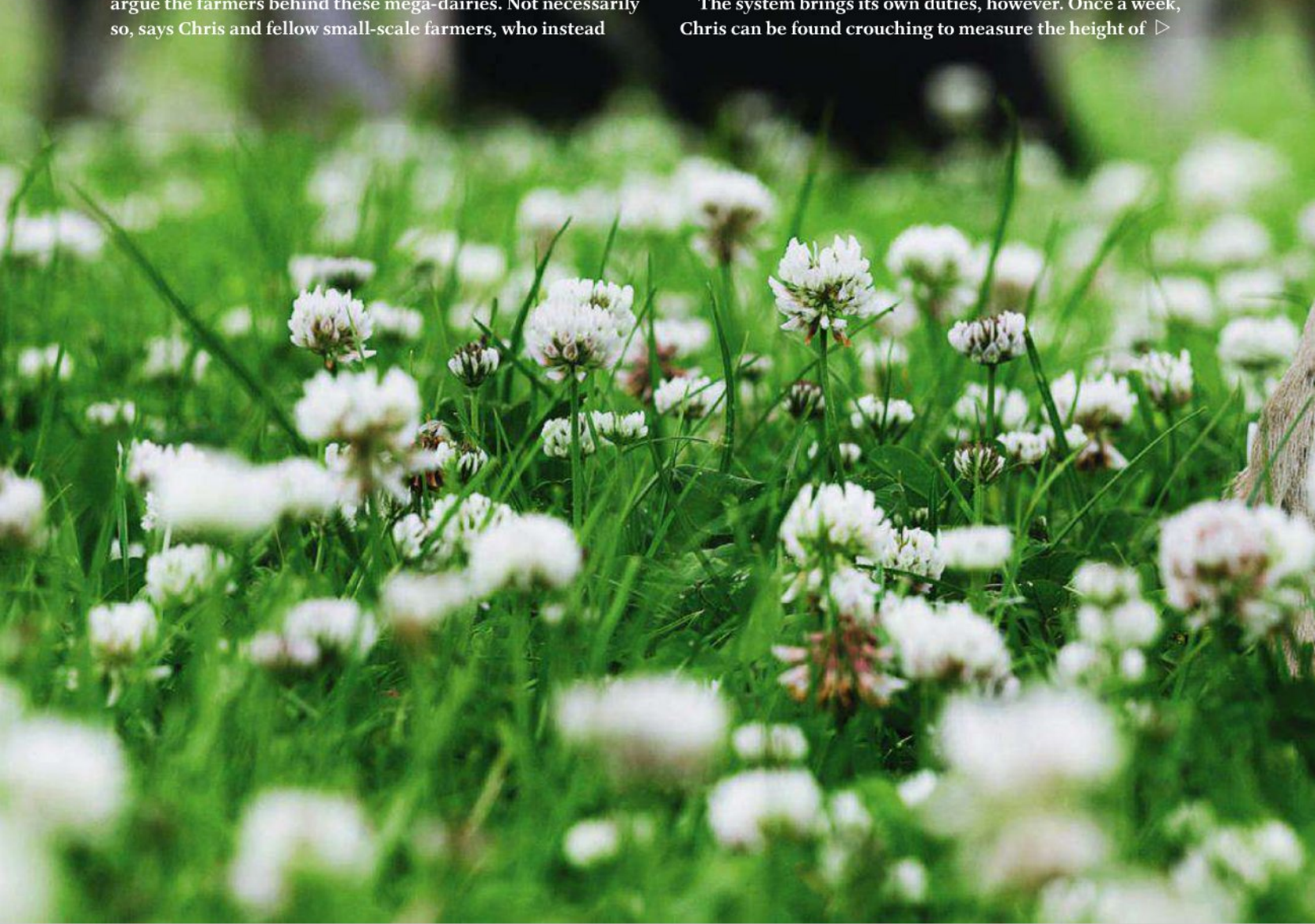
**I**t's six o'clock on a cool spring morning and sparkling light plays on the walls of Chris Knowles's milking parlour. The golden-coated Jersey in front of him has produced just more than 13 litres – a fairly low yield by today's standards, but this Cornish dairy farmer still has a smile on his face. He's part of a quiet revolution, going against the tide of the past decade, which has seen the number of dairy farms almost halve because most farmers aren't being paid enough for their milk to cover production costs.

Meanwhile, a new hyper-intensive method of dairy farming looms in the form of super dairies. One proposed in Lincolnshire, although recently scrapped due to environmental problems with the site, would have housed more than 4,000 cows. Others are sure to follow. As in most intensive dairy farms, the animals would be pushed to their limit of milk production. And instead of grazing on pasture, these animals would be fed on bought-in forage and cereals and kept largely indoors. Cows need to calve every year in order to produce continuously high yields of milk and there is still a question mark over what would happen to the male calves – the demand for veal in Britain remains low and raising them for beef is often uneconomic, despite several schemes to encourage it. Bigger is the only way to survive, argue the farmers behind these mega-dairies. Not necessarily so, says Chris and fellow small-scale farmers, who instead

favour quality over quantity, and are returning to traditional methods to produce a top drop of milk that fetches a premium.

Shortly after milking, ignoring the bracing sea breeze on his 550 acres near St Ives, Chris's 300 cows are devouring the clover-rich pasture – the key to his success. Thanks to an abundance of good-quality grass at Trink Farm, Chris was able to turn away from bought-in feeds and producing calves all year round to satisfy the demand of the dairies. The inspiration for his approach came from a desire to take the grind out of milking and spend more time with his wife Rachel and three young daughters. He dramatically altered the farming system inherited from his parents, including changing the breed of cow from the large, bony, near-ubiquitous black-and-white Holstein to the traditional smaller, hardier British Friesian and Jersey breeds. "Grazing pasture is what these girls do best and what we've done in effect is to get them to do the work for us," Chris says. "Instead of taking the feeds indoors to them, they get the grass themselves." As the grass-growing season comes to an end in the autumn, so, too, does the lactation period of the cows. "At this point we can all enjoy an almost two-month break from milking. The cycle then begins again in spring when the cows have their calves."

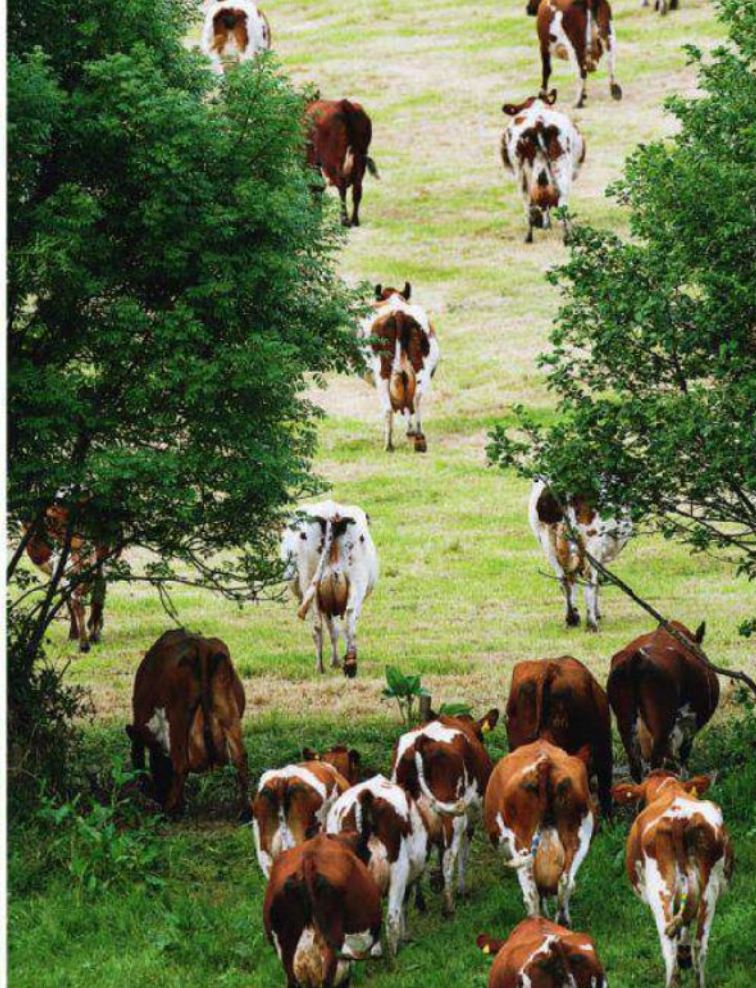
The system brings its own duties, however. Once a week, Chris can be found crouching to measure the height of ▷







Traditional hardier British breeds, such as the Guernsey and the Ayrshire, suit outdoor grazing



his grass with an electronic device that enables him to gauge how fast it is growing: "It contains everything the cows need, but it has to be nurtured and encouraged to flourish – and that means moving the herd to new pastures after every milking, so the fields have a chance to recover, and leading them along special tracks so they don't damage prime grass." Cows reared in this way may produce less milk, but it commands a premium price at local clotted-cream company Rodda's because of its high quality.

This 'less is more' approach is gaining momentum. A growing number of people are seeking out milk that has gone straight from cow to bottle, with no processing or interference, and with the cream firmly at the top. Recognising the problem of allergies and intolerances led dairy farmer Steve Hook, from Longleys Farm in Hailsham, East Sussex, to offer raw milk direct to customers. "We've done nothing to it and that is its selling point," Steve says. "Legally, only farmers can sell raw milk to customers, so we were able to do what the supermarkets can't." But he says he couldn't have kept the business going had he merely sold the organic milk from his herd of 74 British Friesian cows to the big dairies: "Everything revolves around volumes in the world of milk production today. We had to do something different to survive."

Inspired by the tremendous demand for the raw milk he delivered and sold from the farm gate in covetable vintage-style bottles bearing the green Hook & Son design, Steve launched a national mail-order service. "We sent out 700 pints in the first week back in February 2010, and within nine months we had doubled our volume to 1,400 pints." He estimates he would have received just 15 pence per pint had he supplied a large dairy, while £1.90 is the price he can command for a pint delivered

*"Grass contains everything the cows need but it has to be nurtured – and that means moving the herds to new fields after every milking"*

anywhere in the UK in a sealed, insulated cardboard box: "The fanbase is varied and some people believe that raw milk is better for you." According to Campaign for Real Milk, pasteurisation, which was introduced in the 1920s to address appalling animal nutrition and inadequate production methods, destroys a number of beneficial bacteria as well as enzymes and several vitamins.

Matt Dale's story has a similarly refreshing flavour. Five years ago he had three cows and a round of 30 customers – today he milks 20 cows on his 40-acre tenanted farm on the North Aston Estate in Oxfordshire. It's purely down to the local thirst for the

rich, unhomogenised, Soil Association-certified organic milk that his herd of pedigree Ayrshire cows produces. Far from wanting to increase the size of his small herd, he is perfectly content to serve his 250 customers, processing, bottling and delivering every pint himself. "I'm passionate about organic produce and local food," says Matt, who managed to keep his set-up costs down by using

second-hand equipment. Today, he is determined to spread the word about what he is doing, not only to customers but also to other dairy farmers struggling to keep afloat. "You don't have to milk hundreds of cows to earn a decent living," he explains. "Selling direct to the customer is an exciting alternative."

Chris, Steve and Matt all hope to inspire future generations with their dairies. As Chris says: "We have proved that reinstating traditional methods has many advantages – for the farmer, for customers who appreciate quality milk and, very importantly, for the animals themselves." 🐄

To buy milk via mail order from Hook & Son, call 01323 449494 or visit [www.hookandson.co.uk](http://www.hookandson.co.uk). To contact Matt Dale at North Aston Dairy, e-mail [mattdale@phonecoop.coop](mailto:mattdale@phonecoop.coop).



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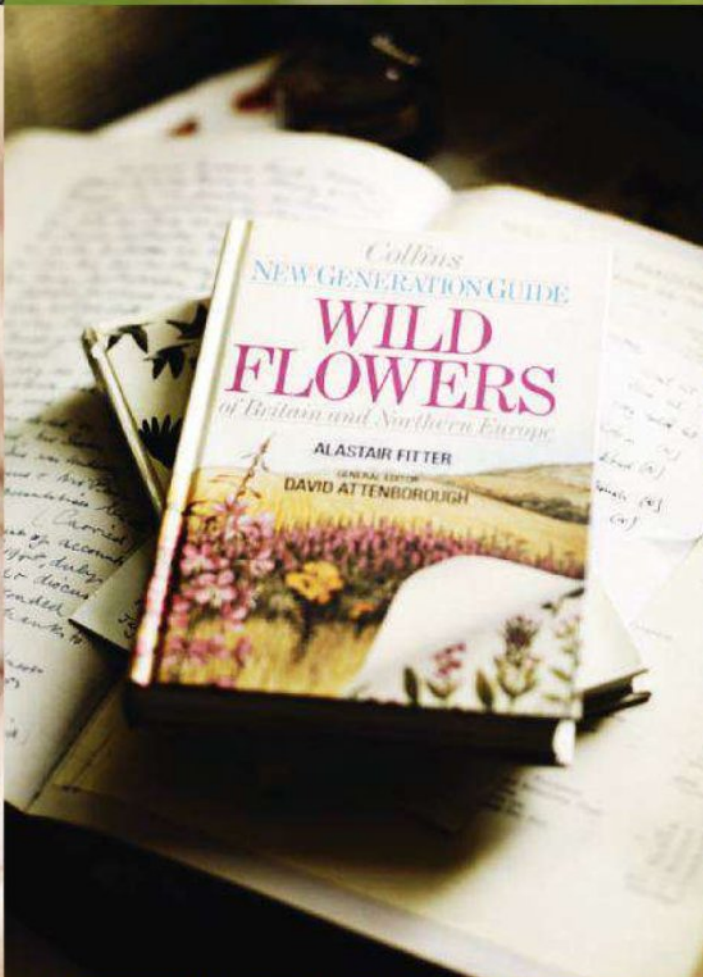
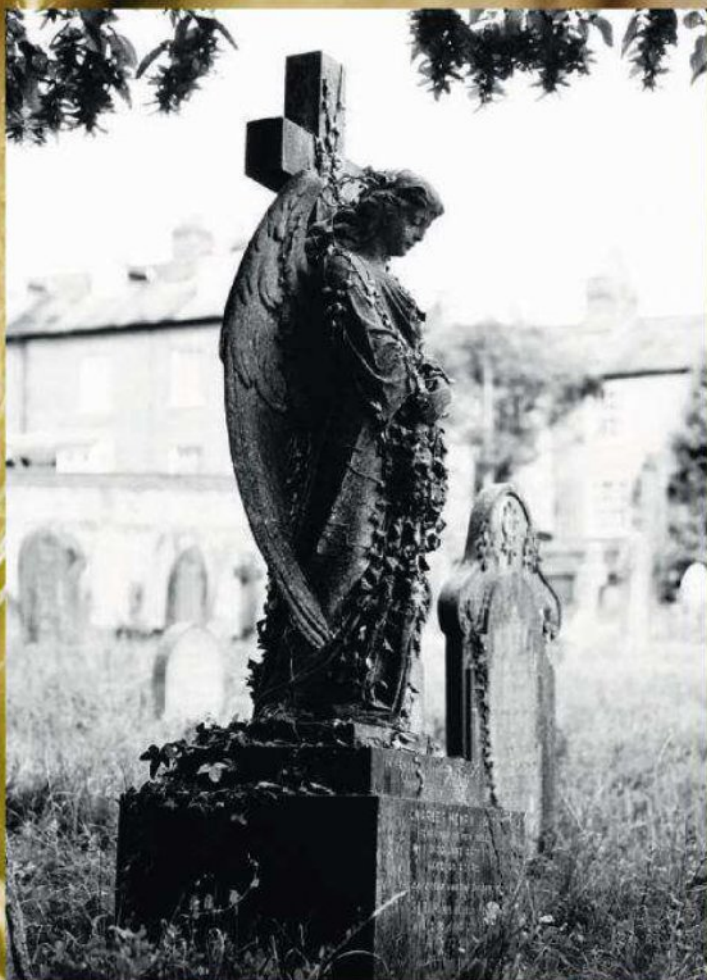
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# *The living* CHURCHYARD

*Flora and fauna flourish amid the swaying grasses, lichen-covered headstones and brambly corners of Holy Trinity in Henley*

WORDS BY KATE LANGRISH | PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW MONTGOMERY



OPPOSITE PAGE Butterflies, frogs and flowers have made a welcome return. THIS PAGE Reverend Duncan Carter regularly records the increase in different species





FROM LEFT Long grass helps promote butterfly numbers; local stone, rather than marble, allows lichens to take hold

In among the regular parish notices about jumble sales and choir practice, there's a large sign on the notice board of Holy Trinity Church in Henley-on-Thames titled 'Why we don't cut nettles'. For while other congregations may focus on rotas for flower arranging or polishing the brasses, churchgoers here divvy up the jobs of scything the grass, clearing brambles or organising a wildflower count in the graveyard. The notice about nettles, with detailed pictures of caterpillars and butterflies, explains to visitors why it is not a carefully mown lawn, but instead a haven for wildlife.

"There's something that draws people to churchyards – whether they're religious or not," explains Holy Trinity's Reverend Duncan Carter. "They offer sanctuary, and peace. And with our neighbourhoods becoming more and more built up, they're increasingly oases for nature, too."

Built in 1848, Holy Trinity sits on a couple of acres in a quiet corner of leafy Henley. Reverend Carter took over in 1990 and was soon approached by retired architect, member of the congregation and butterfly enthusiast Maurice Litchfield. "He

came to speak to me with a plan for leaving areas of long grass and nettles for caterpillars to feed on and pupate," Reverend Carter says. "Then in 1997 we decided to take part in a project called Living Churchyards. The local wildlife group came down and helped us do a survey, and it's grown and grown since then. On the first surveys in 1992 and 1995 we had 143 plant species, but another one we did in 1999 found more than 200, and there's an even greater variety today."

Now scabious, primroses and fritillaries are dotted between headstones, patches of ground are covered with a yellow carpet of lady's bedstraw, while song thrushes and green woodpeckers sit in the boughs of the old yew tree and finches flit among the teasels. Last year a swarm of ladybirds covered a statue, for two days the churchyard was teeming with hundreds of six-spot burnet moths newly hatched from the nettles, and children from the neighbouring primary school found a nest of bumblebees.

That a small area should be so rich in wildlife is no surprise to Reverend Carter. "Churchyards are often very old and many of them pre-date the churches

themselves. And for centuries they've been untainted by pesticides and artificial fertilisers – they've remained relatively untouched, even while landscapes around them have been changing."

In the past, parish churchyards would have been similar to the grasslands surrounding them – sometimes grazed by sheep. Some vicars even had the hay harvest from the churchyard as part of their salary. But the advent of the lawn mower and more manicured grass has seen the rise of the 'bowling green' graveyard in recent years – a monoculture that spells disaster for local wildlife.

The congregation at Holy Trinity has made a conscious stand against this trend – but it's not a case of letting it run wild. "It's important to have varying heights of grass to provide as many different habitats as possible," says churchgoer Paul Clayden, one of around seven regular volunteers. "We allow some of the brambles, but they can take over, so it's as essential to clear certain areas."

Holy Trinity joins a growing number of churches recognising the huge value of graveyards for local wildlife. Sue Cooper is the manager of Caring for God's Acre, ▷



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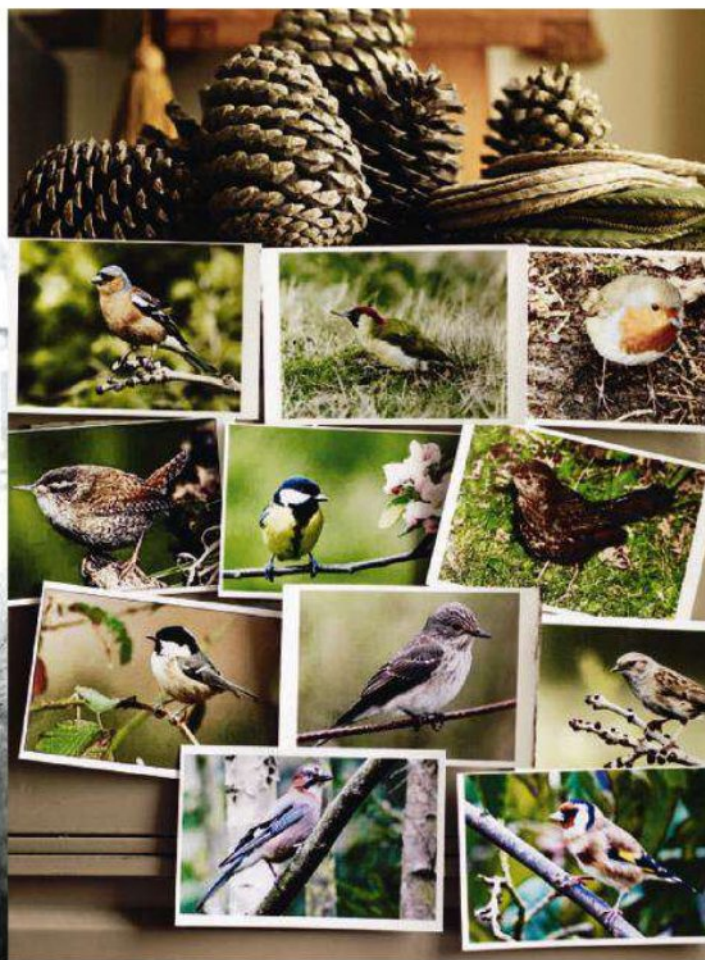
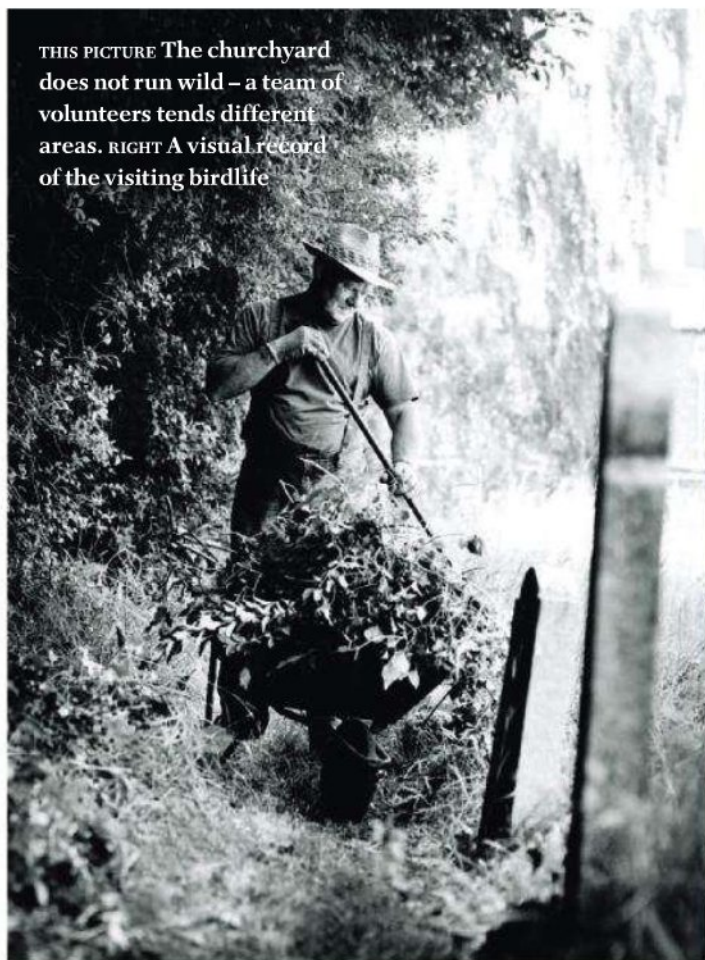
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NEW 2011 BROCHURE



THIS PICTURE The churchyard does not run wild – a team of volunteers tends different areas. RIGHT A visual record of the visiting birdlife



a charity established ten years ago to promote wildlife measures on church land. “Churchyards are such fantastic places for wildlife because they have a mixture of habitats. There are grasslands, trees and shrubs, the church buildings themselves, and not forgetting the stonework, which can be both ancient and modern,” she explains. “Even the headstones can support a variety of species. You will often find certain lichens on the top of headstones, because they need bird droppings to thrive, while different species of moss and lichen will be on the north- and south-facing sides. It’s one of the reasons we favour using local stone, which allows lichen to take hold, rather than polished imported marble on which nothing can live.”

Reverend Carter agrees: “People tend to focus on the animals or the wildflowers, but because we’ve kept lime mortar in the church walls, we’ve got black spleenwort ferns and wall lettuce growing between the brickwork, which were once common but are now quite rare in the area.”

For some, however, the idea of a wildlife sanctuary is at odds with a churchyard as a memorial place. “Every year, the same

person writes to tell me what a mess the place looks, but I think we strike a careful balance,” Reverend Carter says. “We make sure the areas in front of the church and along paths to more recent graves are neat and closely mown. And I say to everyone that if they want to keep a particular grave clear, we will always do that.”

In fact, Holy Trinity has even converted some sceptics. Michael Willoughby first came to the churchyard following his interest in First World War graves. “I like to see the area around them looking clipped and neat, so I wasn’t keen on how overgrown they were,” he says. “I started by clearing them, but then got involved with removing brambles from other areas. I’ve never seen so many frogs, and I even saw a deer once. It has become a real haven for me, too.”

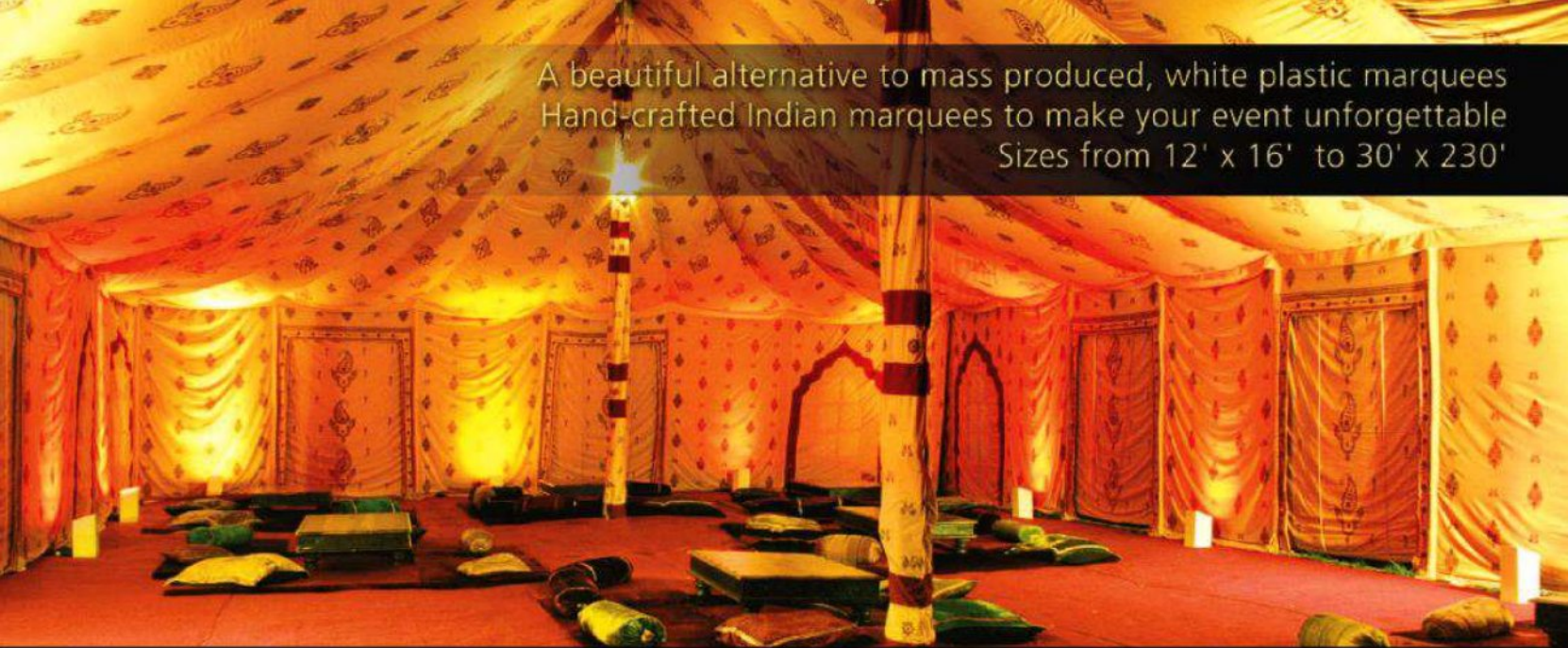
Reverend Carter doesn’t believe there’s a clash between churchyards as a place for remembering and for wildlife: “They are not just about the dead, they are for the living, too. They’re places to look back and reflect, but also look forward. The Christian gospel is about resurrection and the flowers, the beetles and the butterflies all speak of this living cycle.” 🐞

## How to green your churchyard

- **Conduct a survey** to find out what species are there already.
- **Contact your local Wildlife Trust** for advice on how to encourage wildlife that’s under threat in your particular area ([wildlifetrusts.org](http://wildlifetrusts.org))
- **Don’t be afraid** to start small: just leaving a metre of long grass around the edge of the churchyard provides a valuable habitat.
- **For more advice** about starting your own project and to download a wildlife management plan, visit [caringforgodsacre.org.uk](http://caringforgodsacre.org.uk). Cherishing Churchyards week, which runs from 10-19 June, could be a good time to gather support.
- **Find further inspiration** at these churches: St John the Baptist, Hope Bagot, Shropshire ([hopebagot.org.uk](http://hopebagot.org.uk)). St Mary’s, Whitton, Shropshire ([whitton-stmarys.org.uk](http://whitton-stmarys.org.uk)). Holy Trinity, Bronington, Wrexham ([wrexham.gov.uk](http://wrexham.gov.uk)). St David’s, Little Dewchurch, Herefordshire ([stdavidslittledewchurch.org.uk](http://stdavidslittledewchurch.org.uk)).



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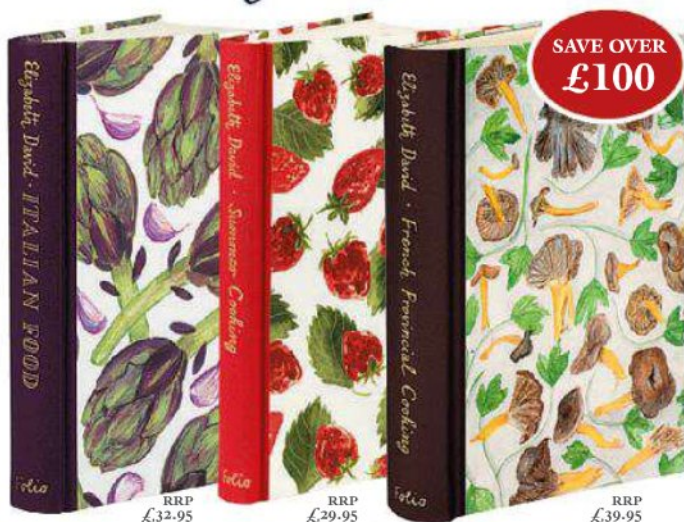
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Too often rural Britain is considered the poor relation to cities when it comes to exhibitions, bookshops, theatre and music, but, as our inspiring review reveals, in many regions, the arts are thriving

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MASAKO KUBO

### MUSIC VENUES

"We are all unabashedly planning for people's pleasure, concocting that mix of high art and hedonism, which at its best can be so intoxicating." The words of Anthony Whitworth-Jones, general director of Garsington Opera in Oxfordshire, neatly evoke the lure of a phenomenon that combines exquisite music with an enchanting rural setting. Since Glyndebourne in East Sussex first opened its doors

in 1934, country-house opera has become a signature ingredient of the ideal British summer. At its grandest, chandeliers, Champagne and celebrities are involved: at Grange Park Opera in Hampshire, for example, you can enjoy a luxury picnic in a pavilion, before taking your seat inside a restored neoclassical temple. But it is not all about banquets and ballgowns: Glyndebourne is renowned as one of the world's leading opera houses, while Grange





IN THE

SIDE

Park is building a reputation for its productions of lesser-known works.

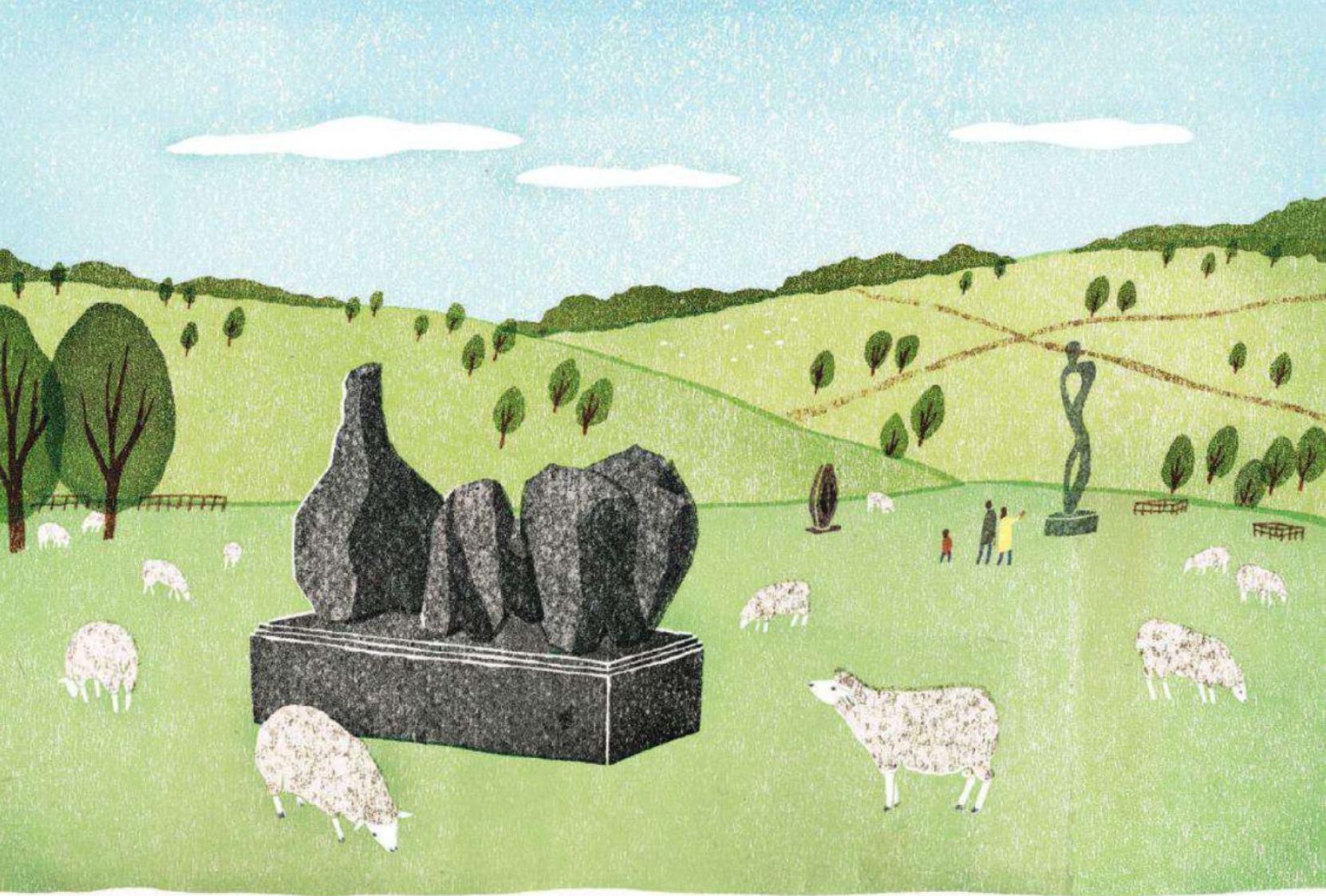
If opera, mansion houses and landscaped gardens aren't to your taste, you may prefer the pared-down interior of Snape Maltings Concert Hall near Aldeburgh in Suffolk – an aptly austere setting for the chamber music performances, solo recitals and premieres that have made the summertime Aldeburgh Music Festival such a prestigious classical music event. Since being converted from a

Victorian malting house in 1967 by the composer Benjamin Britten, Snape Maltings has become a sanctuary for musicians and music lovers, who come to be inspired by the landscape Britten immortalised. It is, according to pianist Alfred Brendel, “one of those rare artistic places where the buildings, the people who visit and work there and the magical setting, come together and enable you to do something out of the ordinary.” Through its work with young talents

and local people, it is a community resource as much as a concert hall – a place to inspire a new generation of musicians and their audiences. ▷

- Aldeburgh Music Festival, 10-26 June 2011 (01728 687110; [aldeburgh.co.uk](http://aldeburgh.co.uk))
- Garsington Opera, 2 June-5 July 2011 (01865 368201; [garsingtonopera.org](http://garsingtonopera.org))
- Glyndebourne, 21 May-28 August 2011 (01273 813813; [glyndebourne.com](http://glyndebourne.com))
- Grange Park Opera, 2 June-12 July 2011 (01962 737366; [grangeparkopera.co.uk](http://grangeparkopera.co.uk))





## OPEN STUDIOS AND ART GALLERIES

Who can resist a peek into the life of an artist? The countryside lends itself to open studio trails where art lovers are invited to meet painters and craftspeople, see them in action, learn about their skills and experience the surroundings that nourish their imagination.

Now in its ninth year, Spring Fling has established itself as a firm date in Dumfries & Galloway's cultural calendar. Take part in this inspiring event, which now draws 10,000 visitors, and you can choose from 86 venues including Andrew Priestman's pottery in the Galloway Forest Park, where he uses a woodburning kiln to produce his beautiful porcelain and stoneware designs, and Lochdougan Farm near Castle Douglas where abstract painter Bea Last, ceramicist Hannah McAndrew and mixed-media artist Sherry Campion show their diverse work in a collection of converted outbuildings.

"Guided walks and cycle tours that take in the stunning scenery and a selection of studios along the way add extra appeal for

visitors," says co-ordinator Colin Tennant. "The rural setting is a big attraction."

A year-round attraction, Gainsborough's House is the birthplace of the famous 18th-century artist in the Suffolk market town of Sudbury where cows still drink from the river at the water meadows, just as they did in his paintings. But, despite its history, this art venue isn't standing still. Not only is it a museum and gallery hosting four or five exhibitions each year – including modern work as well as that of its illustrious namesake and his contemporaries – but you can also explore your own artistic talent in the monthly life-drawing classes. Alternatively, try the print workshop – where anyone from keen beginners to established artists, who become a member, is able to use the press that overlooks the walled garden complete with quince and mulberry trees.

One of the many strengths of rural galleries is their sense of place, drawing on the rich vein of talent in their area and exhibiting work that celebrates local distinctiveness. This is a major theme at Brecon-based Oriel Pen Y Fan Gallery where visitors can surround themselves

with Welsh scenes, from snow-covered moors to waterfalls in summer.

Combining fresh air, exercise and art, the 500-acre Yorkshire Sculpture Park at West Bretton offers a unique experience. Immerse yourself in a landscape that showcases the vast bronzes of Henry Moore, work by Andy Goldsworthy – look out for the piece built into one of the estate's historic ha-has – and James Turrell whose 'Skyspace' incorporates the 18th-century Grade II-listed deer shelter building. A private pleasure ground turned open-air gallery, the park displays at least 60 pieces at any one time, including work by current international talents. Only in such a rural space could both artists and visitors explore the relationship between culture and nature with so much freedom. ▷

● **Gainsborough's House** (01787 372958; [gainsborough.org](http://gainsborough.org))

● **Oriel Pen Y Fan Gallery** (01874 611102; [orielpenyfanguallery.co.uk](http://orielpenyfanguallery.co.uk))

● **Spring Fling, 28-30 May 2011** (01387 262084; [spring-fling.co.uk](http://spring-fling.co.uk))

● **Yorkshire Sculpture Park** (01924 832631; [ysp.co.uk](http://ysp.co.uk))



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## MUSEUMS

Forget the queues, the bother of booking tickets in advance or shuffling around exhibits alongside hordes of others – the best rural museums are small, friendly operations where you can wander at will while increasing your knowledge and know-how. Even those in relatively remote outposts can offer cultural treasure and provide a revealing insight into an area through its links to the past and the wider world.

Since 1837, the waterfront Stromness Museum on Orkney has amassed a collection of personal mementoes that portray the island's maritime history (ships of the Hudson's Bay Company called here annually throughout the 18th and 19th centuries to recruit workers and in 1919 the German Fleet was scuttled in the waters of Scapa Flow), while the original Victorian natural history gallery portrays Orkney's fascinating and diverse range of flora and fauna.

Dismiss any preconceptions of a rural museum as being fuddy-duddy and old-fashioned – think quirky and original instead. Take Cumberland Pencil Museum in Keswick where each year thousands of visitors learn through interactive elements how the humble pencil became an important part of Cumbria's, and in fact Britain's, social and economic history. First used by local shepherds to mark their sheep, Cumberland graphite, a natural form of pure carbon, became prized all over Europe and was used by Renaissance artists including Michelangelo. You can also develop your own drawing skills in the museum's lively demonstrations and series of workshops.

Visitor involvement is a crucial part of a trip to the award-winning Corinium Museum in the Cotswold town of Cirencester, the second largest Roman

settlement in Britain, which is home to one of the biggest collections of Romano-British antiquities in the country. Here you can experience life as a Roman, using weights and measures from the past, exploring reconstructed rooms, taking tours of the forum and designing your own mosaic. Or trace a path from the Iron Age to the English Civil War through visual tales of war, wool and royalty.

A chance to step inside an unusual or historic building is another major draw for museum-goers to the countryside. Ceramic lovers should head to Sharpe's Pottery Museum in Swadlincote, Derbyshire, where a converted 19th-century brick bottle kiln provides an atmospheric backdrop for a display of domestic ware, decorative art pieces and early Cornish Blue. Edifying edifices also take centre stage at the wonderful Weald & Downland Open Air Museum set amid 40 acres of beautiful Sussex countryside on the South Downs. Here you can wander among an array of rural buildings rescued from demolition and rebuilt on the land, such as a 13th-century flint cottage, a medieval shop and a timber-framed thatched barn, learning about vernacular architecture on the way.

This is just a small snapshot of what's available but there's no doubt that Britain's countryside museums have much to offer the culture vulture, with interest, intrigue and involvement high on the agenda. ▷

- **Corinium Museum** (01285 655611; [cotswold.gov.uk](http://cotswold.gov.uk))
- **Cumberland Pencil Museum** (01768 773626; [pencilmuseum.co.uk](http://pencilmuseum.co.uk))
- **Sharpe's Pottery Museum** (01283 222600; [sharpes.org.uk](http://sharpes.org.uk))
- **Stromness Museum** (01856 850025; [orkneycommunities.co.uk](http://orkneycommunities.co.uk))
- **Weald & Downland Open Air Museum** (01243 811348; [wealddown.co.uk](http://wealddown.co.uk))

### GET IN TOUCH, CULTURE VULTURES!

We know that those of you who live in the countryside are making the most of local cultural hotspots – a survey conducted by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport showed that four out of five of you went to the theatre, visited a museum or saw an exhibition during 2009-10. So we want to hear about your recommendations – visit the *Country Living* forums at [allaboutyou.com/countryliving](http://allaboutyou.com/countryliving). And don't miss the winning entry in our poetry competition, inspired by our theme: a celebration of the British countryside (see page 51).



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**Helen Bond**, Veterinary Affairs Manager at Purina PetCare

## HAPPY AND HEALTHY

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**Rosie Bucher**, Norfolk

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**TERMS & CONDITIONS** 1) The first 100 readers to e-mail will be sent one gift from the following selection: ball launcher, dog towel, dog water bottle, tripod chair or canvas travel dog bowl. Gifts selected at random. 2) Nestlé Purina PetCare UK Ltd would like to retain data relating to entrants for future marketing use. If you do not wish your details to be added to our database, please write 'No Marketing' in your entry e-mail. 3) This promotion is available to residents of Great Britain only, except employees and their immediate families of Nestlé Purina PetCare UK Ltd, its agents or anyone professionally connected to the promotion. 4) Respondents must be aged 18 years or over. 5) Closing date for giveaway is 30 April 2011. 6) Winners will be notified by e-mail if they have won within 30 days of closing date. Prizes will be sent within 30 days of closing date. 7) Promoter: Nestlé Purina PetCare UK Ltd, St Georges House, Park Lane, Croydon CR9 1NR



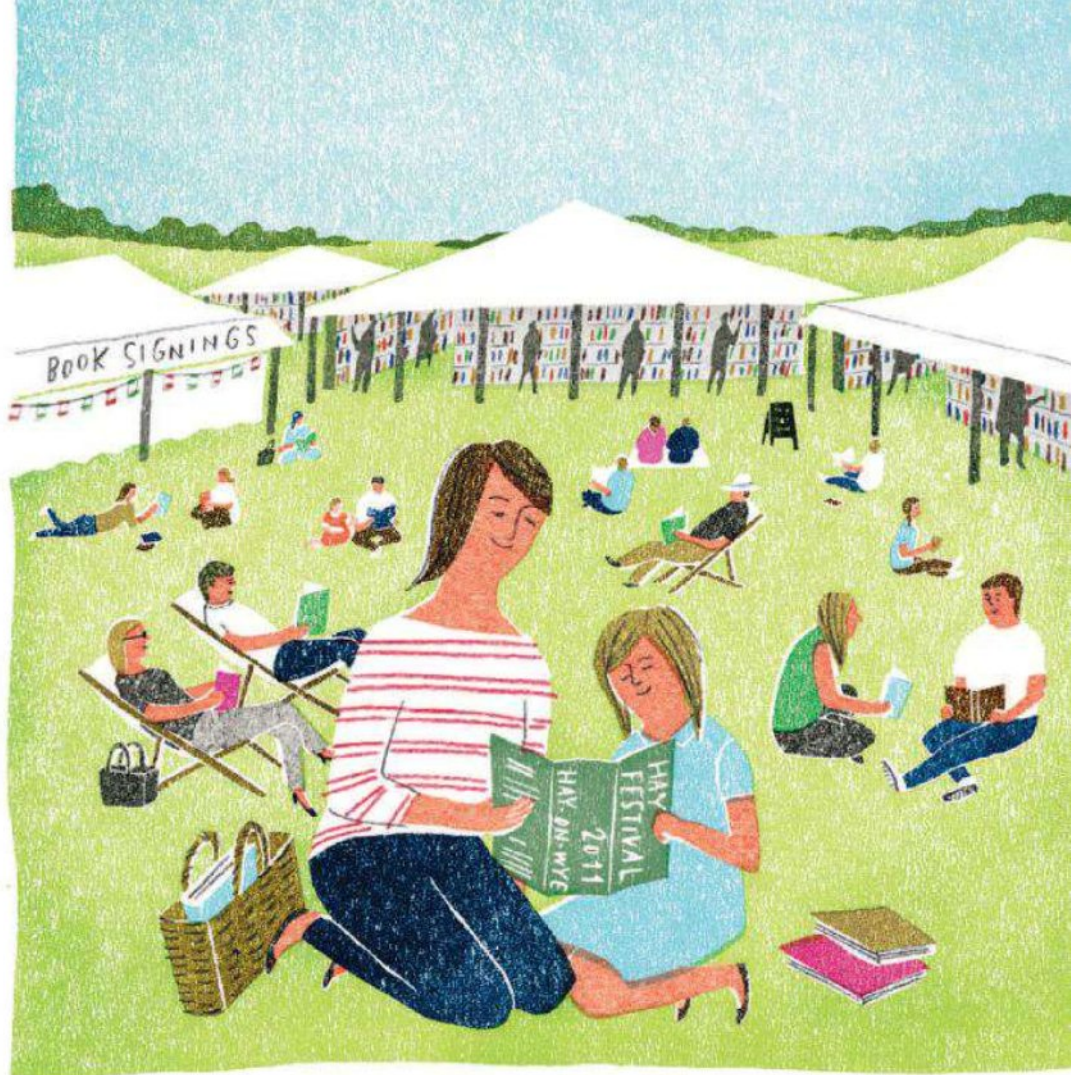
## THEATRE

Step back to Regency England in the elegant, colourful interior of The Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. With flickering lights that create the effect of candles and oil lamps of a bygone age, theatregoers are entertained with a range of plays, from Shakespearean comedies to J.B. Priestley thrillers. Seating 350, the theatre brings actors and audience together for an intimate experience that can often be lacking in larger city venues – one of the many charms of rural drama, along with natural surroundings and the involvement of local talent. A jewel in the crown of countryside venues, it has been treated to a £5 million-plus restoration to its original 1819 design and plays to a full house once more. This is one of only two working Georgian theatres in the country (the other is in Richmond, Yorkshire), and succeeds because, says artistic director Colin Blumenau, “We are firmly rooted in the community with workshops, projects and a local writers’ group.”

Visit the Riverside Theatre near the Causeway Coast in County Londonderry this spring or summer and you can choose from a performance of Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, the ballet *Coppélia* or Irish and Scottish music from talented group Kintra. It was founded in 1976 at the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, when the province’s three theatres were all in the capital, Belfast. Today, 34 years on, the Riverside is a lively, stimulating venue with 13,000 regular visitors each year. The front-of-house staff are volunteers from the area, and nurturing emerging talents in local writers, composers, directors and producers as well as actors is a guiding principle.

There can be few more dramatic and inspiring settings for a performance than the shores of Derwentwater in Cumbria, with views across Borrowdale and the Western Fells. Here, despite funding cuts in the regions, the Theatre by the Lake is flourishing. “It’s an eccentric operation and a lot of fun,” says executive director Patric Gilchrist. As the saying goes, the show must go on.

- **The Riverside Theatre** (028 7032 3232; [riversidetheatre.org.uk](http://riversidetheatre.org.uk))
- **Theatre by the Lake** (01768 774411; [theatrebythelake.com](http://theatrebythelake.com))
- **The Theatre Royal** (01284 769505; [theatreroyal.org](http://theatreroyal.org))



## BOOKSHOPS, TOWNS AND FESTIVALS

“Independent bookshops can’t compete on equal terms with the internet,” says Meryl Halls of The Booksellers Association, “but it’s not about price, it’s about creating an experience.” Much Ado Books in Alfriston, East Sussex (CL February 2009), is doing just that. Make a trip to its new, larger premises – a restored barn – to browse the well-stocked shelves, which include a selection of titles about the local area as well as the Bloomsbury Group, attend a book signing or enjoy a talk by an author.

Diversification is also an important feature of one of former children’s laureate Michael Morpurgo’s favourite bookshops, The Main Street Trading Company, in St Boswells in the Scottish Borders, where antiques, crafts and toys are for sale alongside the 6,500 titles.

Second-hand bookshops will always attract the bibliophiles among us, which is how the book town was born. Wigtown in Dumfries & Galloway and Sedburgh in Cumbria are establishing themselves,

but Hay-on-Wye on the Welsh border still reigns supreme, with 38 bookshops, instigated by Richard Booth in 1961. Visit his vast shop, now run by an American entrepreneur, Elizabeth Haycox, who has added a café and is planning a cinema.

Growing locally and globally is the Hay Festival, created 24 years ago as a literary event and now encompassing the arts in general. Head to the small market town along with 85,000 others for the ten-day event next month that has spawned Hay Festivals in ten venues around the world. There’s no doubt that festivals are booming – between May and November you could attend one every week in a countryside setting, joining people of all ages keen to see books come to life. 🐾

- **Hay Festival** (26 May-5 June 2011; 01497 822629, [hayfestival.com](http://hayfestival.com))
- **The Main Street Trading Company** (01835 824087; [mainstreetbooks.co.uk](http://mainstreetbooks.co.uk))
- **Much Ado Books** (01323 871222; [muchadobooks.com](http://muchadobooks.com))
- **Richard Booth’s Bookshop** (01497 820322; [boothbooks.co.uk](http://boothbooks.co.uk))

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# A dozen DREAM HOMES

In this inspiring series, we celebrate different types of quintessential rural homes and present our round-up of the best to buy or rent. This month: **the Georgian rectory**

WORDS BY SALLY COULTHARD | PROPERTY RESEARCH BY NICOLA DEVEREUX



Just like a child's drawing, with a door in the middle, windows symmetrically arranged either side and above, and a pretty roofline with chimneys, the Georgian rectory is the ultimate storybook house.

These charismatic buildings have a firm grip on the British psyche. Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters were daughters of clergymen and their books painted a vivid and sometimes amusing picture of life in and around the rectory. Yet these properties were designed with a deeply serious purpose. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the head of the local church occupied the moral centre of his community, so it was fitting that his home should be at the heart of the village. The life of an Anglican rector was also a privileged one: the day-to-day business of gentry and clergy in rural Britain were intertwined – a rector needed a home fit for a gentlemen and Georgian rectories often have rooms originally for servants.

Today, these properties make excellent family homes. Their

central village locations are ideally placed for schools, shops and community life and they're large enough to accommodate a growing family. Thanks to the Georgian obsession with proportion and symmetry, the rooms are often spacious and need little alteration, which is fortunate as most are at least Grade II-listed. The gardens tend to be generous, too. In the past, village parties and fêtes were hosted by the rector at his home – it's not unusual to find Georgian rectories with large lawns and terraces, even in the most tightly packed villages.

Rectories tend not to come on the open market as often as other types of property. Their popularity has meant that, in buoyant times, word-of-mouth was often enough to secure a sale. The current slower property market means prices are more reasonable and a greater number are appearing in the windows of estate agents. To find out more about the history and appeal of Georgian rectories, see [rectorysociety.org.uk](http://rectorysociety.org.uk). House hunters should also visit [georgianproperty.com](http://georgianproperty.com). ▷





**£895,000 Caythorpe, Lincolnshire**

This three-floor property retains many original features and has six bedrooms, cellars, a walk-in pantry, and the grounds include a summerhouse and fruit trees.



**£875,000 Ab Kettleby, Leicestershire**

Built in 1759, this five-bedroom house has original sandstone floors and period fireplaces, as well as an orangery, two-storey coach house and a glasshouse.



**£845,000 Barton in Fabis, Nottinghamshire**

Set in two-thirds of an acre of walled grounds, this sensitively restored house has five bedrooms, five reception rooms, beamed ceilings and a large garage.



**£725,000 Driffield, Yorkshire**

A five-bedroom house and two attached cottages set in over five acres, with a music room, conservatory, mature gardens, stores and two paddocks.



*Property of the MONTH*

**£745,000 Newport, Shropshire**

Approached through wrought-iron gates, this impressive house has a double front door that opens into a grand reception hall with polished parquet flooring and a cantilevered staircase. There are six-bedrooms, a dining room and breakfast room with views over a walled garden.



**£700,000 Ashford, Kent**

The principal portion of a former rectory, this four-bedroom house is set in grounds of one acre with well-established gardens, views to the church and large cellars with natural light.



**£695,000 Chalgrove, Oxon**

The west wing of this rectory has been converted into a three-storey house, which includes the original staircase, six bedrooms and an Aga in the large kitchen.



**£430,000 Stewartstown, Co Tyrone, Northern Ireland**

Built in 1811, this four-storey house has seven bedrooms, period features, a wine cellar, outbuildings and formal gardens which have been restored.



**£2,970-£3,510 per week Bridport, Dorset**

Set in one-and-a-half acres, just over a mile from the sea, this 11-bedroom house has a billiard room and library. Sleeps 26.



**From £2,895 per week Whitbourne, Worcestershire**

A seven-bedroom holiday home with a sweeping oak staircase, dining room seating 24 guests, garden room, Aga, barbecue and lawned gardens. Sleeps 18.



**£1,585-£2,100 per week Shelton, Norfolk**

Ten-bedroom property with large rooms, period features, antique furniture, open fireplaces and views over the fields and the village church. Sleeps 18.



**£2,000 per month Totnes, Devon**

A furnished house with seven bedrooms and elegant entrance hall, set in two-and-a-half acres looking out across the Avon valley to Dartmoor. 🐾

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# LIVING *above* the SHOP

Pale painted furniture and French vintage finds fill the ground floor of a Georgian building in Norwich, reflecting the passions of its owner in her stylish home upstairs

STYLING BY HESTER PAGE | PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHARLIE COLMER

WORDS BY CAROLINE ATKINS





OPPOSITE Simple porcelain pieces by local ceramicist Lars Soendergaard provide a contrast to exuberant alstroemeria. THIS PAGE The shop stocks an array of appealing weathered items





Claire Halsey's intriguing flat is an atmospheric showcase for the furniture and artefacts she collects, restores and sells in her shop downstairs. But then, full of beautiful things arranged as naturally as though someone lived among them, this does in fact rather resemble a house. "The boundary between the two shifts constantly," she explains. "Pieces from the shop find a place in my home, and other things I'm ready to say goodbye to end up in the shop."

She has run The Bell Jar in Norwich since 2004, when she bought the double-fronted

Georgian building – formerly two separate shops, one a bookbinder, the other selling vintage 1960s designs – after falling in love with its wonderful curved windows, which now show off her stock like elegant display cases. The space above, two floors of open-plan storage, she turned into a flat, dividing it up to create practical living and sleeping areas and installing kitchen and bathroom fittings from local salvage yards. For the first four years she rented it out, only making it her home in 2008 when she and youngest daughter, Martha, decided to move from the family cottage in Suffolk to this stylish





city apartment. Downsizing meant most of the Suffolk furniture had to become Bell Jar merchandise: "I try not to be sentimental," Claire says, philosophically. "I've let go of many beautiful things over the years, but that's just the nature of this business."

The flat has its own separate front door with a winding Georgian staircase rising to a landing. This leads into the kitchen on one side and, on the other, into the new bedroom Claire carved for herself out of the sunny three-windowed sitting room that ran right across the front of the house. Grey-painted French doors link the two rooms, and the

sitting room in turn leads into the kitchen, so that the whole floor takes you in a circle, each room with a raw, 'undecorated' style that provides a muted background for many objects of interest. Walls are painted in greys and taupes, and light from the south-facing sash windows falls on bare floorboards, stripped woodwork and natural surfaces.

In the kitchen, these include an exposed brick chimney breast, the slate shelves that hold an array of glass and china above the worktop and the stone sink and draining board in one corner. The cupboards, built by her cabinet-maker son Josh, are fronted

by old doors in a mixture of rough wood and distressed paintwork. A circular table stands in front of the fireplace, painted red, then grey and rubbed back to look worn, while an old Victorian dining chair has been painted and waxed – leather back included – so that it has an almost lacquered appearance.

Clare trained in textiles at Chelsea College of Art and worked in fashion design for ▷

**OPPOSITE** Simple rustic pieces sit alongside exposed natural materials in the flat and shop. **ABOVE** Painted furniture and original artworks bring character to the kitchen





THIS PAGE Lulu relaxing on a favourite cushion.  
OPPOSITE In the sitting room, the old French doors used to front a corner cupboard allow decorative objects to be displayed while cleverly concealing the television



*"Some of the paints are by Farrow & Ball, but  
most of them are shades I mixed myself, then  
waxed in places to give a worn, uneven finish"*







many years, but her real love is paint. "When I found this place," she says, "everything came together – fabrics and furniture and paint." Regular forays to French markets and *vides-greniers* have unearthed beautiful old linens, which she has turned into cushions and curtains, as well as the wonderful glazed doors she brought home on top of her van and installed at the back of the shop to open it up to the garden. Auctions and sale rooms have yielded up everything from mirrors and headboards to the Hungarian cabinet that stands beside her bed. And evidence of her paintwork is everywhere – not just the furniture, but her own paintings, mostly small still-life compositions, that hang with others she has collected over the years.


A brick-floored stable at the rear of the shop became Claire's workroom, where she sews and paints. "What I enjoy most," she says, "is finding lovely things and putting them together, bringing out their potential and seeing them go to new homes." This

could be anything from an antique cup and saucer to an elegant old empty frame waiting for the right picture. The shop attracts anyone with an eye for good pieces, from professional stylists and props-finders from film studios, to discerning passers-by who find themselves drawn in irresistibly by the sight of the treasures within.

Each time an item goes to a new home, the view through the graceful windows changes a little, but soon settles into an equally inviting tableau. Because, as Claire says, "Whenever a lovely piece leaves the shop, something special always turns up to take its place." 🐦  
*The Bell Jar, 93 Upper St Giles Street, Norwich (01603 767752). For soft furnishing, painted furniture and interior design commissions, contact Claire at [clarehalsey2@aol.com](mailto:clarehalsey2@aol.com).*

**TOP LEFT** Old French crochetwork and linen hang at the windows. **LEFT** Claire creates cushions from beautiful vintage fabrics. **ABOVE** The bedroom has a pale, peaceful air





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# *The passionate* gardener

Clive Groves

Continuing our series on horticultural devotees whose gardens and lives are shaped by their love of one species or planting style, we meet Clive Groves, who specialises in breeding violets at his nursery in Dorset

WORDS BY STEPHANIE DONALDSON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DIANNA JAZWINSKI AND RICHARD BLOOM



OPPOSITE PAGE *Viola odorata*  
'Charles William Groves',  
named after Clive's father.  
THIS PAGE Clive with a crate of  
his beloved violet plants





THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT Clive sieving a soil mix created specially for violet cultivation into a pot; *Viola odorata* 'Annalesia'; *Viola odorata* 'Baroness de Rothschild'. OPPOSITE *Viola odorata* 'White Witch'



Clive Grove's lifelong love of violets began in childhood when they grew in fragrant and colourful abundance on the banks of the lanes around his home, and later were grown commercially by his father Charles who advertised his first violet, 'Princess of Wales', in 1946. Since then, through breeding and acquiring of other collections, The Violet Nurseries has grown to offer over 100 varieties and its Victorian Dorset violets have been recognised as a national collection. It is housed on the same site as the family-run garden centre – Clive comes from a long line of nurserymen, with CW Groves and Son representing more than 140 years of gardening history in West Dorset through six generations. Recently retired from running the business, Clive has returned to his first love – working full time at the nursery, tending and breeding his beloved violets.

My first garden was a secret hidden patch in an isolated corner under trees when I was about nine years old. I didn't tell the family because I just wanted to experiment on my own and although it didn't work terribly well, I did have some minor successes.

Growing up on the nursery I earned pocket money doing routine tasks – cleaning clay pots, making wooden seed trays, creating holly wreaths for Christmas and bagging onion sets. I can't say I was excited by any of it and the reason I went to horticultural college was because my parents told me to go. I didn't enjoy that either until near the end of the course when I finally began to take an interest in it.

Back at the nursery, I initially worked in the seed-packet department, but I spent most of my time looking out of the window at girls passing by. At the time, the nursery specialised in strawberry plants and my father started growing violets because they like the same conditions. He began with a couple of varieties and gradually expanded the range as he bought up collections from

the West Country where the red spider mite had become too much of a problem for the growers. The turning point for me was when a collection arrived from Dawlish with violets blooming in clumps of red Devon soil. It rekindled my love of the flowers I had seen in the lanes of my childhood. I set about getting every variety possible, before they were lost for ever. Some proved elusive. 'Mrs David Lloyd George' had disappeared until I had a midnight call from a friend in Australia to say that he had found a few plants in an old garden there. Another friend rescued 'Countess of Shaftesbury' from extinction when he came across it in an old lady's garden in California. 'Legresley' turned up in Canada where it had arrived on a sailing ship in 1833: the plant's descendants had been cherished by the original family ever since.

Although violets aren't nearly as popular as they once were, enthusiasts do meet up biannually for a Violet Conference and I'm still involved, especially now that I've handed over the running of the nursery to the next generation and am back working full time with the violets. One of my favourite retirement presents from the nursery staff was a concrete mixer – so I can make my own specific soil mixes.

I love everything about these flowers. I have to admit to wearing a little violet scent on special occasions. My pride and joy is my violet dressing gown with a violet emblem embroidered on the pocket! ▷







### What made you want to grow violets?

My father decided to specialise in selling violet plants at our nursery. I remember the long rows of plants stretching down the field and the men forking huge clumps of 'Princess of Wales' violets into wooden wheelbarrows to take them to the potting shed where they were stripped of their runners (which were heeled back into the ground) and the plants were then posted all over the country. The leaves are scented as well, so even if there were no flowers, the potting shed would smell like heaven.

### Which are the qualities of violets that particularly appeal to you?

Their perfume, of course – there is nothing else like it. And the colour, too – I always have some violet-coloured clothing on me somewhere. Of course there are violets of all shades from traditional violet through blue to pink, red and even yellow.

### How and where would you recommend growing violets?

They should be planted beneath deciduous trees and shrubs in moist positions or in a herbaceous border where the perennials die down over winter and expose the violets for early spring flowering. In the wild they enjoy cool, damp banks that are shaded only in the summer, but during winter they need as much sun as possible.

### Will they naturalise?

Yes they will, in the situations mentioned above. Plant *Viola odorata* or *V. odorata* 'Alba' in clumps of three and keep them clear of weeds and grass for the first three years, and after that they'll look after themselves.

### Are your violets improved cultivars of the wild violet?

Yes, most are cultivars of our native sweet violets that appear in the wild with either

violet, white or pink flowers. They have also been crossed with the Russian violet to add vigour and hardiness.

### What is the difference between *Viola odorata* and Parma violets?

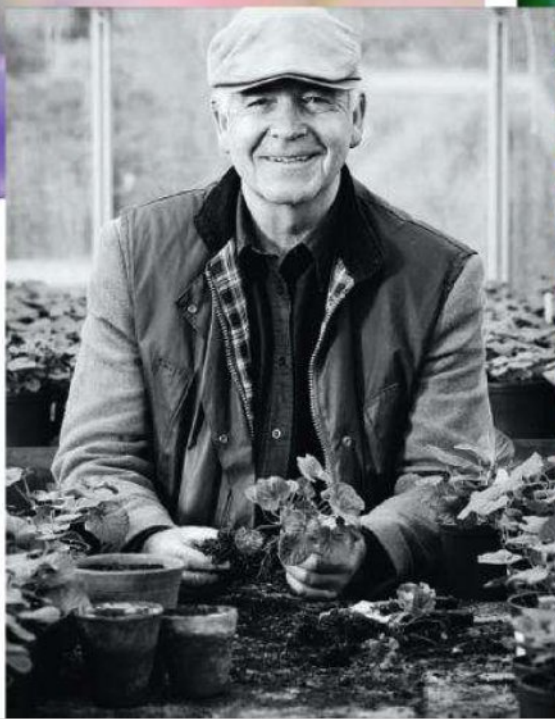
Parmas are a bit of a mystery. There is a school of thought that they arrived from the east – maybe Persia into Europe via Italy – but recent DNA tests suggest they might have evolved through hybridisation in the wild. Parmas are generally double – not as hardy as the sweet violet – so they are best grown under cold glass, either in frames or glasshouses. Their scent is different, too: the sweet violet has a rather pungent smell and parmas have a confectionery-sweet perfume.

### What are the main pests and diseases and how should they be dealt with?

The worst pest is red spider mite and this is why violets need summer shade. In the past, many growers were put out of business because they used to grow violets on south-facing slopes to get the early crops. Spraying insecticides evolved a super-strain of red spider mite they couldn't eradicate. We defoliate our plants if they get too bad and introduce predators in our greenhouses. 🐞  
Groves Nurseries, West Bay Road, Bridport, Dorset (01308 422654; grovesnurseries.co.uk).  
The national collection is in bloom Jan-April.



ABOVE *Viola odorata* 'Empress Augusta'.  
RIGHT Clive at work in one of the glasshouses.  
FAR RIGHT Flowers of Parma violets, such as *Viola* 'D'Udine', are generally double.  
OPPOSITE The distinctive pink blooms of *Viola odorata* 'Perle Rose'







## *Clive's favourite violets*

---

● ***Viola odorata* 'Countess of Shaftesbury'** A rare, beautiful old Dorset-bred violet with a raised pink and white central crest and violet-blue outer petals.

● ***Viola odorata*** The common or sweet violet, which is native to this country and has a sweet, unmistakable perfume.

● ***Viola* 'Becky Groves'** A pink cultivar of my own breeding named after my daughter.

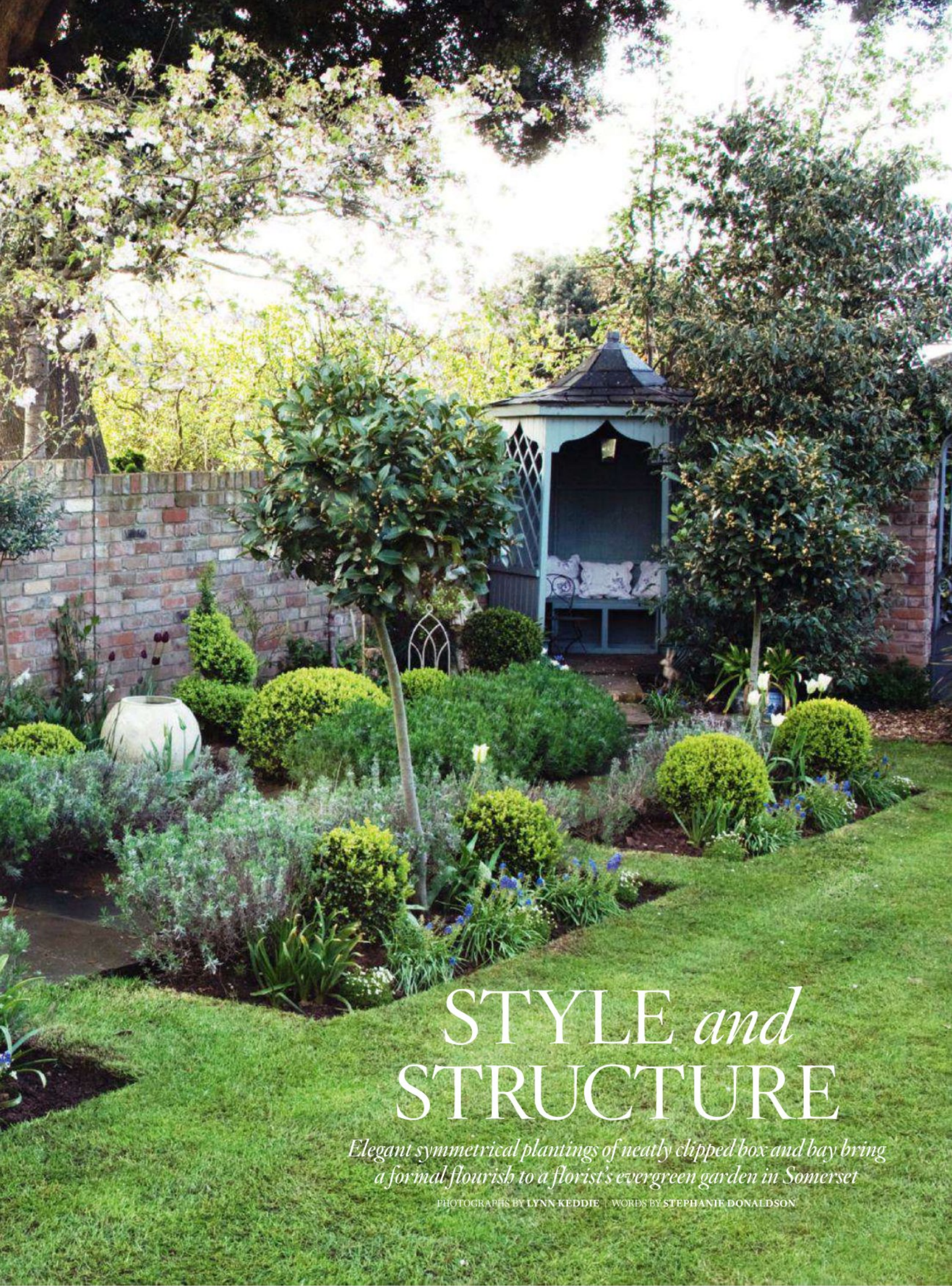
● ***Viola odorata* 'Perle Rose'** A tough little flower with petals in a distinctive bright pink.

● ***Viola* 'D'Udine'** A Parma variety with red-flecked blue flowers and long stems ideal for cutting.









# STYLE *and* STRUCTURE

*Elegant symmetrical plantings of neatly clipped box and bay bring a formal flourish to a florist's evergreen garden in Somerset*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LYNN KEDDIE | WORDS BY STEPHANIE DONALDSON





THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE  
A stone container adds weathered charm; box lollipops stand in galvanised buckets; a mirror hung on an ivy-clad wall casts beautiful reflections. OPPOSITE PAGE Wisteria frames a view of the conservatory

After 20 years of cottage gardening, Somerset florist Rose Fisher felt in need of a change. "I did love the garden but, to be honest, it was a bit twee and I decided it was time to make things simpler," she explains. So, five years ago, Rose and her husband Chris ripped everything out of their Taunton plot, leaving only a *Clematis montana*, a wisteria and a hawthorn tree. This revealed a generously proportioned flat space that was an ideal starting point for what Rose had in mind. After the exuberant informality of the cottage garden she hankered after a cool, restrained and elegant space.

"I wanted a more formal garden with planting that featured structural elements – box, bay and pleached limes," she says. Aware that this style of garden would need to be well-maintained to look good, she designed the beds so that they could be easily accessed from either side.

In the meantime, Chris went to the local reclamation yard for old bricks to build walls to frame the formal symmetry of the garden. Those marking the boundary on either side of the garden are two metres

high, while the one at the far end is set two metres forward, concealing a path that leads to a back entrance on one side and the working part of the garden (with greenhouse, compost heaps and nursery beds) on the other. The pleached limes are planted directly behind this wall, adding height and privacy. A decorative metalwork gate is set into it to increase the sense of 'going behind the scenes'.

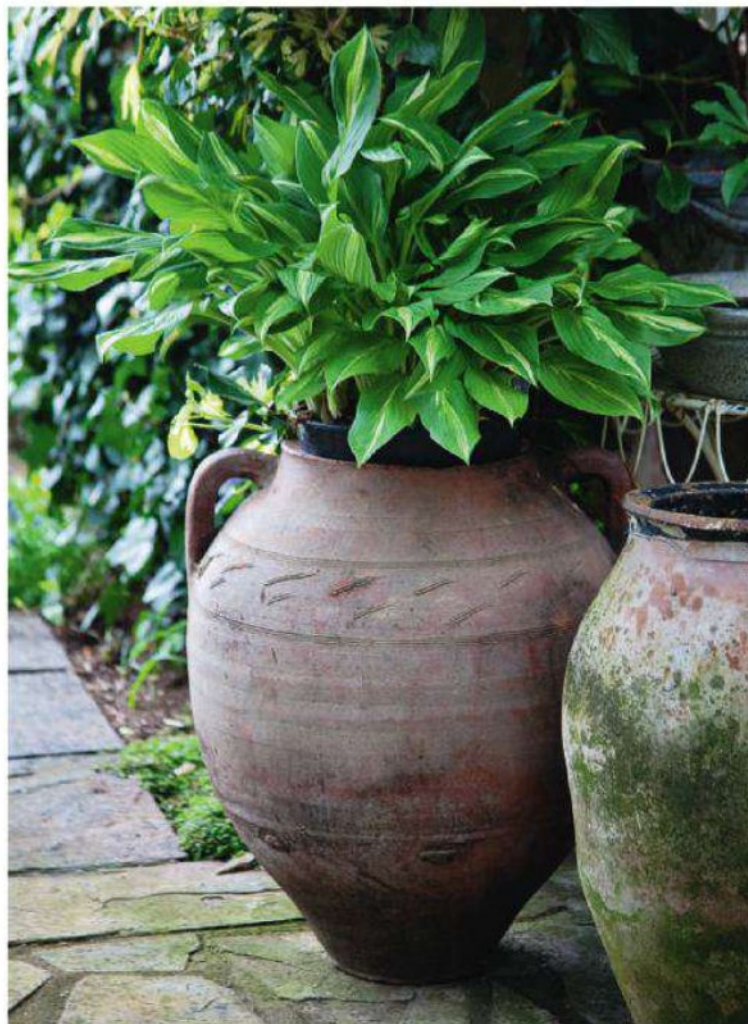
Showing admirable restraint, Rose waited until all of Chris's immaculate hard landscaping was complete before starting the planting. "We put in the topiary box as they were, in their pots, in case we decided to move them. We haven't, but they are still in the containers and don't seem to have suffered." Rose prunes the box "more than is recommended because I like to keep them very neat and, anyway," she adds, "I find it therapeutic." Standard bay trees planted in the borders are similarly well maintained, while the hawthorn tree in the centre of the lawn has had gentler treatment, its gnarled trunk topped with attractively spreading branches.

A magnificent mature holm oak in the adjoining garden to one side, and a ▷









THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A bird table hangs from the branches of the hawthorn tree; box balls and cones in the black-and-green bed; hostas flourish in large pots. OPPOSITE PAGE Muscari and white tulips break up the repeat planting of box, bay and lavender

multi-stemmed silver birch to the other, lend a sense of maturity, although they do also mean that it is mostly shaded except at the centre. The downside of the holm oak is its habit of shedding leaves for much of the year. Since Rose has discovered that an essential element of a formal garden is that it looks crisp and tidy, she finds she is constantly having to clean up after it.

There are other plants that she is much more relaxed about, though. Mind-your-own-business (*Soleirolia soleirolii*) is welcome. "I know it is invasive," Rose says, "but it fills the cracks and crevices by the paths and also looks wonderful in pots." Where it has spread on the ground, it is accompanied by a tiny-leaved fern called *Leptinella* 'Platt's Black', violets and dwarf double-flowered campanulas. In the borders, bulbs and perennials add seasonal interest and soften the formality. The original plan was to restrict the palette to nothing but green and white but, on reflection, Rose found this a bit boring so she has now introduced some purples, blues and pale pinks.

Containers add further interest, with a varied selection ranging from weathered

urns to terracotta pots and even baskets (Rose has found they generally last around five or six years outside). Many are planted with white cyclamen and tulips in winter and these are followed by a selection of herbaceous plants to create "miniature herbaceous borders" in the summer.

There have been some adjustments to the design since the original work five years ago – in particular, the area in front of the wall at the end of the garden proved to be damp with poor growing conditions so Chris recently built a rectangular pond, with a dog's-head gargoyle wall fountain.

Although their idea had been to create a simpler, easier-to-maintain garden, when Rose says, with a big smile, "It didn't turn out quite that way", you get the feeling that she really isn't too disappointed. 🐾 Rose specialises in wedding floristry, creating country designs with a modern touch. For enquiries, contact her at [rosefisher@sky.com](mailto:rosefisher@sky.com) or call 01823 333769. She also exhibits at country fairs and will be at Cothay Manor & Gardens near Wellington, Somerset, for its Garden, Plants and Food Fair on Saturday 18 June 2011 ([www.cothaymanor.co.uk](http://www.cothaymanor.co.uk)) in aid of St Margaret's Hospice.



## Key plants in the garden

- **Box topiary** A mixture of balls, pyramids and spirals provide the main structural element of the garden.
- **Standard bay trees** One in each border and several in containers add height and a contrast in scale.
- **Mind-your-own-business** (*Soleirolia soleirolia*) Softens hard edges, but needs to be kept under control.
- **Lavender** ('Hidcote') Lines the main path, adding a waft of

fragrance in summer and neat mounds of silver foliage in winter. Although in shade in the morning, it thrives in the afternoon sunshine.

- **Hostas** Planted in containers, their lush, broad leaves have an architectural quality, with miniature varieties used for corsages and buttonholes in the floral designs Rose produces for weddings.







Our new regular food writer, **Diana Henry** has twice been named Cookery Writer of the Year by

the Guild of Food Writers for her column in *The Sunday Telegraph*. Diana grew up in the Northern Irish countryside and is a champion of both British and Irish produce (and farmers) – she is always thrilled to discover a new cheese or artisan bread. When not sampling food, she is on the road researching her books, which include *The Gastropub Cookbook*, *Cook Simple*, *Food from Plenty* and *Crazy Water, Pickled Lemons*.



# The Easter FEAST

## MENU

Mussel, salmon and saffron soup

•  
Roast lamb with goat's cheese, spinach and sour-cherry stuffing

•  
Farro with parsley and lemon

•  
Sweet and sour cucumber with dill

•  
Triple chocolate cake with candied orange

I loved Easter just as much as Christmas when I was a child. It started with finding eggs – chocolate ones and hen's eggs dyed pastel colours by my mother – hidden in the garden. My grandparents came for a roast lamb lunch and the table was adorned with flowers. There was a sense of relief that winter was behind us and summer not far away. Now, as an adult planning the Easter meal, I feel a breeze around me, a burst of optimism. I want to write my shopping list in the garden, relishing the smell of the air. The strong identity of the seasons is one of the best things about living in Britain and the move from winter to spring is the most dramatic. Easter, which heralds growth and renewal, is a marker, a new beginning, and the meal should convey this. You

need freshness, greenness, colour, lightness and even frivolity. My head fills with leafy greens, saffron, tangy goat's cheese, salmon and chocolate.

Of course, we have a choice of what to make the centrepiece of the Easter meal but lamb is the most popular dish. It's loaded with symbolism and speaks of rebirth. I find it satisfying to serve a meal that is part of a historical continuum. It's a choice that links us to other countries, too – on Easter Sunday, Sicilians will be making a lamb braise and Greeks will be serving a roast joint with potatoes, lemon and oregano. Perhaps, most importantly, serving lamb at Easter gives particular pleasure if it is a custom within your own family. These dishes – light and pretty – should help promote a brightness of spirit. Happy Easter!



# Mussel, salmon and saffron soup

PREPARATION: 30 MINUTES

COOKING: 15 MINUTES

Saffron adds a lovely springtime hue.

**Serves 6**

**2kg mussels**

**3 shallots,**  
finely sliced

**300ml dry**  
white wine

**40g unsalted**  
butter, softened

**1 onion, diced**

**a good pinch saffron**

**175ml double cream**

**1 tablespoon flour**

**250g skinless salmon fillet, cut into chunks**

**1½ tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley**

**1** Clean the mussels thoroughly, pulling off any 'beards' and scraping away any little barnacles. Tap each one on the sink and discard any that don't close completely.

**2** Put the mussels in a large pan with the shallots, wine and 200ml cold water. Cover, bring to the boil, and then turn the heat down. Cook over a low heat for 5-7 minutes until the mussels open.

**3** Pour the mussels and liquor into a colander set in a large bowl. Set the mussels aside. Strain the mussel liquor through a sieve lined with muslin to collect all the gritty bits otherwise the soup will taste horrible. Reserve the liquor.

**4** Remove the mussels from their shells, keeping four in their shells per serving to decorate. Discard any that haven't opened.

**5** Melt 15g butter and sauté the onion over a medium to low heat until it's soft but not coloured. Pour the mussel liquor into the pan and bring to the boil. Add the saffron and stir, then add the cream and return the mixture to the boil. Simmer rapidly until the broth has reduced to about 800ml.

**6** Mash the rest of butter with the flour to make a *beurre manié*. With the broth on a low heat, whisk in the *beurre manié* a little at a time. The mixture will thicken slightly.

**7** Add the salmon to the soup and poach for 1 minute, then add the mussels and parsley and heat through. Check the seasoning. Serve the soup, garnished with the reserved mussels in their shells. ▷

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHILIP WEBB

STYLING BY CAROLINE REEVES

RECIPES BY DIANA HENRY

FOOD & DRINK EDITOR ALISON WALKER





## Farro with parsley and lemon

PREPARATION: 10 MINUTES COOKING: 45 MINUTES

Farro is an Italian grain that becomes chewy and nutty when cooked. Look for it in health food shops and local delis – alternatively, use pearled spelt and cook it according to the packet instructions.

### Serves 6

**1½ tablespoons olive oil**  
**1 onion, finely chopped**  
**1 stick celery, diced**  
**300g farro or pearled spelt**  
**900ml chicken stock, vegetable stock or water**

**3 tablespoons finely chopped parsley**  
**finely grated zest and juice of ½ lemon**

**1** Heat the oil in a pan and sauté the onion and celery until they're soft and pale gold. Add the farro, turn it round in the oil and vegetables, then cover with the stock.

**2** Bring to the boil and then turn the heat down to a simmer and cook for about 35 minutes until the farro is just tender (it retains its nutty bite and never becomes soft). Avoid stirring it as it will have a better texture. Add a drop more liquid if it looks as if it is becoming too dry – the liquid should be completely absorbed but you don't want the farro to burn on the bottom of the pan. Stir in the parsley, lemon zest and juice and taste for seasoning.



## Sweet and sour cucumber with dill

PREPARATION: 10 MINUTES PLUS SALTING

Salting the cucumber makes it crisp so it absorbs the dressing without being soggy.

### Serves 6

**1 medium cucumber**  
**1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar**  
**1½ tablespoons caster sugar**  
**1½ tablespoons chopped fresh dill**

**1** Trim the ends of the cucumber and slice thinly with a knife or mandolin. Layer in a colander with 4 teaspoons of flaked sea salt, put a plate on top and set over a bowl, so the juices can run out. Leave for two hours. Rinse and pat dry.

**2** Mix the cucumber with the remaining ingredients and cover until ready to serve. If time is short, mix the sliced cucumber with the vinegar and flavourings and serve immediately. It's not as good but still tasty.

### WHERE TO BUY SPRING LAMB

British lamb heralds the first sign of spring, but although it is thought of as a traditional Easter meat, this is when they tend to be born, not when they're ready to eat. Some lamb from early breeding flocks, which are born under cover in December and January, is available now, however. Try Heritage Prime (01308 482688; [heritageprime.co.uk](http://heritageprime.co.uk)) which sells biodynamically reared meat or Somerset Farm Direct (01398 371387; [somersefarmdirect.co.uk](http://somersefarmdirect.co.uk)), one of Rick Stein's food heroes.



# Roast lamb with goat's cheese, spinach and sour-cherry stuffing

PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES

COOKING: 1 HOUR 15 MINUTES PLUS RESTING

The slightly smoky flavour of the sour cherries and the wonderful tang of the goat's cheese marries beautifully with the succulent spring lamb.

**Serves 6**

**FOR THE STUFFING**

75g dried sour cherries

200g spinach

25g butter

1 onion, finely chopped

2 garlic cloves, crushed

150g goat's cheese, crumbled

75g white breadcrumbs

finely grated zest of ½ lemon

1 tablespoon roughly chopped  
blanched almonds

2 tablespoons chopped tarragon

**FOR THE LAMB**

1.5kg boned leg of lamb (boned weight)

olive oil

60ml white wine

300ml lamb or chicken stock

25g cold unsalted butter

1 Heat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan oven) gas mark 7. Soak the cherries in hot water until plump, then drain. Wash the spinach and remove any coarse stems. Put it into a large pan, cover and wilt the spinach over a low heat for 1-2 minutes until it collapses. Drain. Once it is cool enough to handle, squeeze out any liquid, then roughly chop. Season.

2 Melt the butter for the stuffing in a frying pan and cook the onion until softened but not coloured. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Tip into a bowl and add the remaining stuffing ingredients. Gently mix together and season well.

3 Unroll the lamb and season well with

freshly ground black pepper and sea salt. Spread the stuffing onto the meat, then carefully re-roll the joint and tie at intervals with string. Smear a little olive oil over the meat and season again.

4 Place the lamb in a roasting tin and cook in the oven for 15 minutes. Turn the oven temperature down to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4 and cook for about 45 minutes for pink lamb.

5 Transfer the meat to a warm platter, cover with foil and rest for 20 minutes. Deglaze the roasting tin with the wine, scraping up all the bits on the base with a wooden spoon. Add the stock, bring to the boil and reduce until the sauce has thickened slightly. Pour through a sieve into a clean pan, reheat and whisk in the butter. Serve with the lamb. ▷





## Triple chocolate cake with candied orange

PREPARATION: 40 MINUTES

COOKING: 30 MINUTES

This brownie-style chocolate cake is finished with luscious white chocolate icing and shards of candied orange.

**Serves 6**

**100g butter, plus extra for greasing**

**100g dark chocolate, broken into pieces**

**125g caster sugar**

**3 large eggs, separated**

**finely grated zest of 2 oranges**

**2 tablespoons orange juice**

**2 tablespoons Curaçao or Cointreau**

**30g plain flour, sifted**

**25g cocoa powder, sifted**

**FOR THE ICING**

**45g unsalted butter, softened**

**45g icing sugar, sifted**

**150g white chocolate**

**4 tablespoons crème fraîche**

**TO DECORATE**

**2 oranges**

**100g caster sugar**

**crystallised violets**

**1** Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Lightly grease and line the base of a 20cm cake tin. Melt the dark chocolate in a bowl set over a pan of gently simmering water. Leave to cool a little.

**2** Cream the butter and sugar together with an electric hand whisk until light and fluffy, then add the egg yolks one at a time. Continue beating until the mixture is smooth and creamy. Add the orange zest and juice, Curaçao and chocolate. Fold in the flour and cocoa powder.

**3** In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites until they form medium peaks. Fold one large tablespoon into the cake mixture to loosen it, and then carefully fold in the rest. Turn into the cake tin, smooth the top and bake for 30 minutes until a skewer pushed into the centre of the cake comes

out clean. Cool in the tin for about 10 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack.

**4** Peel the orange rind off in broad strips. Remove any white pith, then cut into fine strips, about the length of your little finger. Squeeze the juice from the oranges and make it up to 225ml with water if needed.

**5** Put the juice and sugar in a pan. Heat gently until the sugar dissolves, then add the rind and simmer for 30 minutes until the liquid has nearly evaporated and the rind is tender. Fish it out and leave it to dry.

**6** To make the icing, beat the butter and icing sugar together with an electric whisk. Melt the white chocolate in a bowl set over a pan of gently simmering water. Allow to cool a little, and then beat in the crème fraîche. When the chocolate mixture has cooled but is still runny, beat it into the butter cream. Chill in the fridge until firm but spreadable, then smooth over the top of the cake with a palette knife.

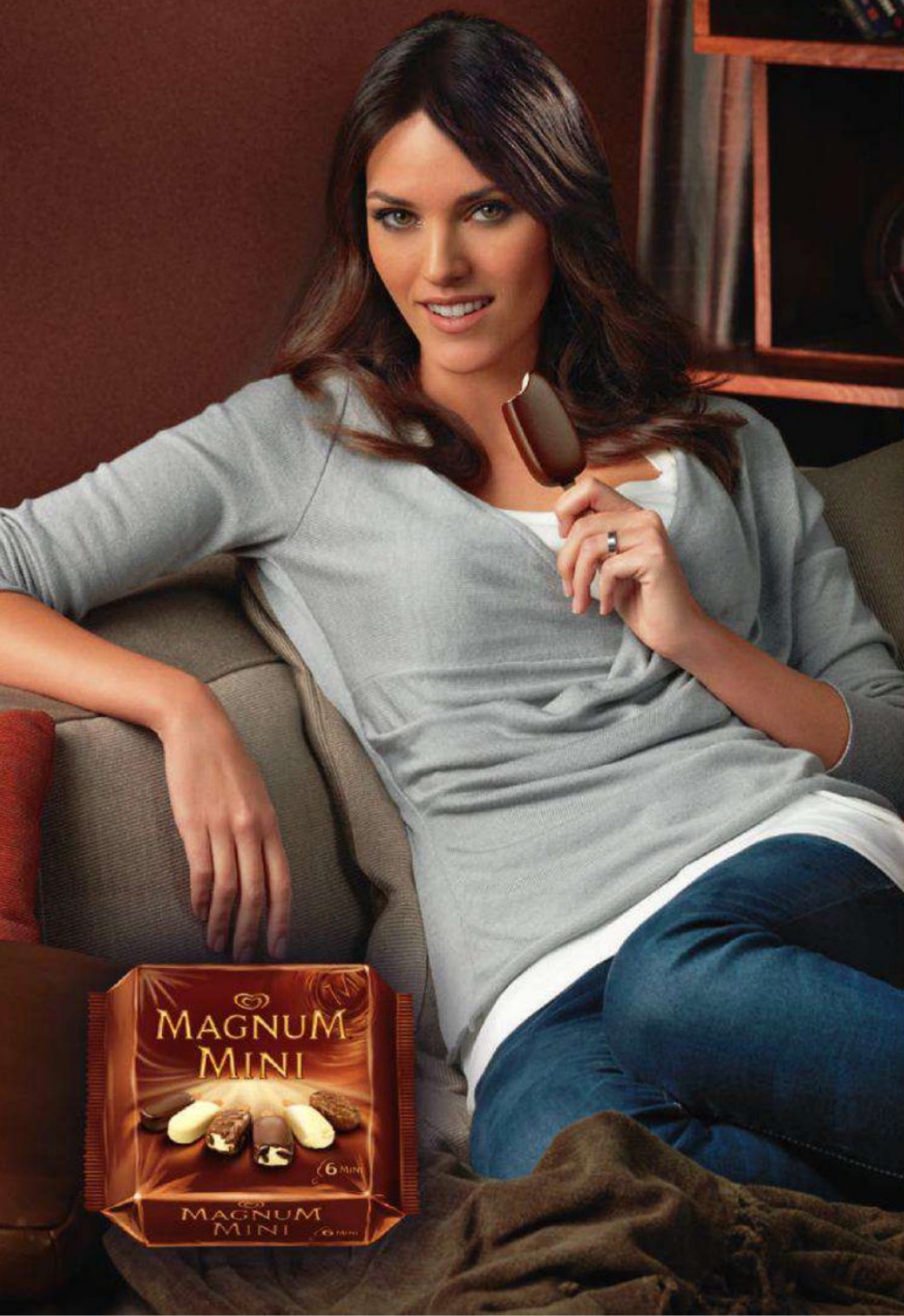
**7** Decorate the cake with the orange rind and scatter with crystallised violets. 🍷





# MAGNUM MINI

  
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a country cook's workshop

# Pickling

Continuing our series exploring traditional skills, Alison Walker transforms a range of fruit and vegetables into tangy pickles to add crunch and flavour to every season

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TARA FISHER | STYLING BY CAROLINE REEVES



PICKLED RED CABBAGE





A simple sweet or pungent pickle can be created by packing practically any fruit or vegetable into glass jars and covering with vinegar, before sealing tightly. More elaborate concoctions combine a mixture of aromatic herbs and fragrant spices (these can be tied in a muslin bag to infuse during preparation, strained before final pickling or added to the jars for interest, but always use whole spices as ground versions cloud the vinegar) and sufficient sugar both to soften the tartness and improve the flavour and texture, which can range from sour to sweet, crisp to tender. When it comes to eating, patience is an essential ingredient – the longer the pickle can be left to mature, the mellower, deeper and more flavourful the final result. ▷



## EQUIPMENT

All utensils and containers should be stainless steel, glass or enamel, with a nylon sieve for straining, because the acid in vinegar reacts with certain metals, turning pickles bitter. Kilner jars or jam jars with vinegar-proof lids make good containers, or traditional large pickle jars are available at [justpreserving.co.uk](http://justpreserving.co.uk) (01603 722120). Sterilise in the hottest cycle of your dishwasher or wash in hot, soapy water then put in the oven at 150°C (130°C fan oven) gas mark 3 for 20 minutes.

## INGREDIENTS

- Vinegar preserves by penetrating food, replacing its natural liquids and inhibiting the growth of micro-organisms. It also infuses the food with its own flavour so the pickle will only ever be as good as the quality of vinegar used. Wine vinegars create delicate, subtle pickles, but the less expensive cider, malt and distilled varieties also produce delicious, if slightly more robust, results. Check the label to ensure your vinegar has at least 5% acetic acid content for successful preservation.
- Depending on the variety, sugar can simply mellow the vinegar or, in the case of muscovado, add another dimension to the flavour.
- Both the vinegar and sugar you choose will affect the final colour: distilled or white wine vinegar and white granulated sugar, for example, are ideal for creating clear pickles, and won't alter the natural colour of pale produce such as cauliflower or eggs.

## A BIT OF TECHNIQUE

There are two methods for pickling: hot and cold. For the former, vinegar is brought to the boil with flavourings and poured over vegetables, enabling it to penetrate more quickly and soften them slightly – particularly good for large, firm vegetables. Alternatively, cold vinegar is poured over vegetables, such as cauliflower, to keep them crunchy. Salt also plays an important role because it draws out excess moisture and maintains crispness. Dry salting is used when pickling delicate vegetables such as cucumber, while a brine is good for firmer varieties.



A light, aromatic combination of distilled vinegar, dark brown sugar, mace, star anise and black peppercorns suits the gentle taste of shallots



## Pickled shallots

PREPARATION: 40 MINUTES COOKING: 8 MINUTES

Shallots have a slightly more delicate flavour than their stronger cousins, pickling onions.

*Makes about 800g*

**800g shallots, peeled and trimmed**

**75g sea salt**

**600ml distilled vinegar**

**125g granulated sugar**

**50g dark brown sugar**

**blade of mace**

**½ teaspoon each Sichuan and**

**black peppercorns**

**1 star anise plus extra**

- 1 Put the shallots and salt into a large non-metallic bowl with 600ml boiling water. Cover and leave overnight.
- 2 Put the remaining ingredients into a pan. Bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes.
- 3 Drain the shallots and add to the pan. Simmer for about 5 minutes until they are transparent but still crisp. Remove with a slotted spoon.
- 4 Pack sterilised jars two-thirds full with the shallots. Pour over the hot vinegar, adding a few peppercorns to each jar, a star anise and a bay leaf. Leave in a cool dark place for a month before eating.



## Spiced oranges

PREPARATION: 30 MINUTES PLUS STANDING

COOKING: 1 HOUR 20 MINUTES

A sweet, spicy pickle that is perfect served with hot or cold ham. Choose unwaxed oranges if you can find them or scrub thoroughly before cooking to remove their wax coating. Blood oranges make a marvellous alternative when in season.

*Makes about 2kg*

10 thin-skinned oranges

600ml white wine vinegar

1kg granulated sugar

1 large cinnamon stick

4 allspice berries

about a dozen cloves

2-3 bay leaves

1 Cut the oranges into 5mm slices. Put in a pan and cover with cold water. Simmer for 30-40 minutes until the peel is tender.

2 Place the remaining ingredients in another pan and heat gently until the sugar is completely dissolved. Bring to the boil and bubble for 2 minutes.

3 Remove the orange slices with a slotted spoon, reserving the liquid, and put into the vinegar mixture. Simmer for 30 minutes until the oranges are translucent. Leave to stand in the liquid overnight.

4 The next day, simmer the oranges again until they are completely tender. Put into sterilised jars and cover with the syrup. Keep the poaching liquid in the fridge and use to top up the orange slices if they absorb some of the vinegar syrup. Leave for six weeks in a cool dark place before eating. ▷





## Fruit mustard pickle

PREPARATION: 30 MINUTES

COOKING: 30 MINUTES

This unusual sweet and hot fruit pickle is called *mostarda di frutta* and originates from Northern Italy. It is traditionally served with a selection of different boiled meats but tastes equally delicious when eaten with cured meats such as salami.

*Makes about 2kg*

850g granulated sugar  
125g lemons and limes, sliced  
250g plums, halved and stoned  
125g black grapes  
250g melon, cubed or balled  
250g pineapple  
150ml white wine vinegar  
50g English mustard powder

- 1 Put 600g sugar into a large pan and add 150ml water. Melt together over a gentle heat until the sugar has completely dissolved.
- 2 Add the fruit and cook over a low heat for 10-15 minutes removing with a slotted spoon as soon as slightly tender. Put all of the fruit and the poaching liquid into a bowl to cool.
- 3 Put the remaining sugar into the pan with the vinegar and simmer for about 15 minutes until it has become thick and syrupy. Leave to cool.
- 4 Mix 2 tablespoons of the vinegar syrup with the mustard powder, then stir into the rest of the vinegar. Leave to one side to thicken for an hour.
- 5 Add the mustard vinegar to the fruit, stir well, and then pack into sterilised jars. Store in a cool dark place for at least two weeks before eating.

## Pickled red cabbage

PREPARATION: 15 MINUTES PLUS SALTING

COOKING: 5 MINUTES

Serve this crunchy pickle with stews and roast meats for a burst of flavour and vibrant colour.

*Makes about 1kg*

1 red cabbage, cored and roughly shredded  
sea salt  
700ml red wine vinegar  
500ml raspberry vinegar  
3 large bay leaves  
6 cloves  
12 juniper berries

- 1 Layer the cabbage in a bowl, sprinkling with salt as you go. Cover and leave overnight.
- 2 Rinse the cabbage, pat dry and pack into sterilised jars.
- 3 Put the remaining ingredients into a pan and boil for 3 minutes. Pour the vinegar over the cabbage so that it is completely submerged – just add more vinegar if there isn't enough. Seal and leave in a cool dark place for at least a month before eating.

## Pickled quail eggs

PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES COOKING: 5 MINUTES

A tasty little snack or accompaniment to curries, these pickled quail eggs are incredibly moreish. Simply increase the quantities of vinegar if you want to pickle hen's eggs instead.

*Makes about 450g*

300ml distilled vinegar  
1.5cm piece fresh root ginger, sliced  
½ tablespoon coriander seeds  
2 dried red chillies  
½ tablespoon black peppercorns  
24 quail eggs

- 1 Put all the ingredients, except the eggs, in a pan. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 5 minutes. Leave to cool completely.
- 2 Gently bubble the eggs in simmering water for 2½ minutes until hard-boiled. Cool under cold running water. Peel when cool enough to handle and pack into sterilised jars.
- 3 Strain the vinegar and pour over the eggs to cover completely. Add a few of the spices for decoration if you like. Seal with vinegar-proof lids. Store in a cool dark place for six weeks before eating. ▷





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## Aromatic spiced pears

PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES COOKING: 30 MINUTES

This is particularly good with cold meats or cheese. For best results, use firm pears such as Conference or Williams.

*Makes about 1.3kg*  
500g granulated sugar  
500ml distilled vinegar  
juice and rind 1 lemon  
1 teaspoon allspice berries  
1 teaspoon whole cloves  
2 small cinnamon sticks  
1.3kg hard pears

1 Put all of the ingredients, except the pears, into a large pan. Heat gently until the sugar is dissolved, then bring to the boil for 5 minutes.

2 Meanwhile, peel and core the pears, slicing into quarters, halves or keeping whole depending on their size.

3 Add the pears to the vinegar mixture and gently poach until just tender – this can take from 5-20 minutes depending on their ripeness. Remove with a slotted spoon as they become tender and then transfer to hot, sterilised jars.

4 Reduce the vinegar by a third, then pour over the pears, adding some of the whole spices for decoration. Cover the top of the pears with waxed paper to keep them submerged and seal with a vinegar-proof lid. Store in a cool, dark place for at least a month before eating. 🍷





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A person is seen from behind, riding a bicycle on a dirt path that winds through a lush, green forest. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of trees, creating a dappled pattern of light and shadow on the path and the surrounding foliage. The cyclist is wearing a blue t-shirt, dark shorts, a red helmet, and a backpack. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and scenic.

# *On your* BIKE!

Taking to two wheels is one of the best ways to explore the British countryside – and the chain reaction is that you will soon become fitter, healthier and happier, too

WORDS BY LUCY DIMBYLOW



**W**hether you're pedalling gently along country lanes or thundering down an off-road track, there's nothing quite like cycling for giving you a sense of freedom. And it's not just a great way to explore the countryside; it's also set to be the hottest fitness trend for 2011. The past few years have seen huge investments in cycling. London Mayor Boris Johnson's Cycle Hire scheme recorded over a million journeys in its first ten weeks, and the 14-medal success of Team GB at the 2008 Olympics has propelled cycling to the top of the popularity charts, with the 2012 games in London set to increase the nation's enthusiasm even further.

"Cycling is the perfect way to get fit, because unlike going to the gym, which will involve a special time commitment, making your regular journeys by bike can be easily fitted into your daily routine," says Dr David Ogilvie, former GP and public health physician at the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR) in Cambridge. In fact, such are the health benefits that the chief medical officer has called for an eight-fold increase in cycling nationwide.

### CYCLE MORE, LIVE LONGER

What makes cycling so good for us? First and foremost, a brisk ride around the park or along a towpath gets our hearts and lungs pumping, strengthening the cardiovascular system. According to a recent UK study, a short cycle ride four times a week could improve your aerobic fitness by 11 per cent in just six weeks. "We also know that physical activity as a whole reduces the risk of many chronic conditions, such as diabetes and certain cancers," Dr Ogilvie adds.

Cycling can also have a positive effect on our mental health. Surveys show that 85 per cent of people suffering from depression find that exercising improves their symptoms, and getting active in an outdoor environment increases the benefits even further. "You're out and about, beating the traffic, breathing fresh air and enjoying the natural beauty of your surroundings, and that will have a noticeable protective effect on mental health,"

explains Phil Insall, health director at Sustrans, a charity promoting sustainable transport.

Bike riding even seems to bolster the immune system, with a 2010 Dutch study showing that people who cycle regularly take fewer sick days. Overall, the health impact is so great that cyclists live up to 14 months longer than non-cyclists, research suggests.

Along with improving your fitness, cycling to work or going for a weekend ride in the country can keep you trim. A recent UK study showed that cycling for just 30 minutes a day could burn over 11lb of fat a year. And it's not just good for you; it's good for the environment, too. Using your bike instead of the car helps to ease traffic congestion and reduces your carbon footprint – not to mention your petrol costs.

Cycling also gives you unparalleled access to the British countryside. From flat river valleys to hair-raising downhill tracks, your bike can get you up close to scenery that cars can never reach. According to the Forestry Commission, improving cycle access is one of the best ways to encourage visitors to our woodlands – and with these tranquil environments known to engender feelings of being at peace, that has knock-on benefits for your state of mind.

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

While cycling is growing in popularity by the day, many of us haven't ridden a bike since our childhood days. But as the old saying would have it, it's an easy skill to re-learn. "Most people find that it all comes back to them as soon as they get on a bike, and you can set your own pace while you regain your confidence," says Duncan Pickering, cycling development manager at the Institute of Advanced Motorists.

If you're an inexperienced cyclist, heading out onto the road can be daunting, however.

But despite the purported risks, an Australian study found that gardeners were more likely to sustain injuries than cyclists.

Even so, it's never been easier to get on your bike, away from traffic. The National Cycle

Network boasts 12,600 miles of safe cycling routes around the UK, with maps available for free download ([sustrans.org.uk](http://sustrans.org.uk)), and its quiet lanes, on-road routes and traffic-free paths make perfect tracks for wary cyclists. ▷

### Three of the best

Stylish choices for off-road adventures or daily trips



● **Giant Sedona W, £350;**  
[giant-bicycles.com](http://giant-bicycles.com)

The lightweight frame and mountain-bike tyres make this hybrid good for both commuting and leisure.



● **Specialized Myka HT Elite, £679.99;**  
[specialized.com](http://specialized.com)

This off-roader's female-specific design has a lightweight aluminium frame and gives a comfortable ride. It will give you the confidence to leave the pavement behind.



● **Pashley Princess Classic, £545;**  
[pashley.co.uk](http://pashley.co.uk)

Perfect for popping to the shops, with its comfy sprung saddle and large wicker basket. Not for cross-country though!







“Experienced riders benefit too, as they can travel on safe, pleasant routes where they can relax, breathe the fresh air and feel better for it,” Phil Insall adds.

There are also many training schemes that can help to build your confidence on the road. The Bikeability programme ([bikeability.org.uk](http://bikeability.org.uk)), which replaced the cycling proficiency test, provides training for adults (beginners included), while the Institute of Advanced Motorists offers one-to-one tuition to suit your skill level ([iam.org.uk](http://iam.org.uk)). In many areas, cycle lessons are also available through the local council’s road safety department.

If you would rather brush up your skills in a less formal way, joining a cycling group could be for you. Banish that mental image of sinewy men in fluorescent Lycra; these days, there are groups for all tastes, including women-only clubs, groups aimed at over-60s, and those that

specialise in gentle country rides with the obligatory pub lunch. Meanwhile, BikeBUDi can match you with a cycling partner for commuting or leisure ([bikebudi.liftshare.com](http://bikebudi.liftshare.com)).

But before you dig out your trusty steed from the back of the shed and hit the road, book it in for some TLC. “To avoid accidents, always have your bike serviced at a reputable local cycle shop if you haven’t ridden it for a while,” Duncan Pickering advises. Alternatively, take advantage of the government’s Cycle to Work scheme ([cyclescheme.co.uk](http://cyclescheme.co.uk)), which provides tax breaks on bike purchases, potentially allowing you to buy a quality pair of wheels for around half price.

“The better the bike, the more comfortable and enjoyable your ride will be,” Duncan says. And with that new set of wheels in your hands, the world – or at least your local park or bridleway – is your oyster. 🐚

## Choosing a bike

Katie Reed of the Association of Cycle Traders offers her top tips for finding the right model

● Take time to decide what sort of bike you want. There are many different types, including road bikes, mountain bikes and multipurpose hybrids, so weigh up what sort of routes and distances you’ll be covering.

● Use an independent bike shop, where you’ll benefit from wider product choice, specialist knowledge and good after-sales service.

● Sit on the bike to ensure it feels comfortable and get the sales advisor to check that it’s the right size for you. If possible, take it for a test drive.

● Budget sensibly: the minimum you should spend to get a safe, roadworthy bike, is £200.

## GREAT GETAWAYS ON TWO WHEELS

### ● BEST FOR FAMILIES

**Hadrian’s Cycleway, four days from £360 per person**

Taking in craggy highlands and peaceful river valleys, this self-guided tour means you can set your own pace. Accommodation is in B&Bs and family-run hotels; routes and itineraries provided (0191 265 1110; [skedaddle.co.uk](http://skedaddle.co.uk)).

### ● BEST FOR ADVENTURE

**Lakeland Epic, seven days from £590 pp**

A week-long white-knuckle ride circling the Lake District in a giant loop. You’ll ride

through some of Britain’s wildest terrain over rough tracks, rocky bridleways and mountain passes, so this trip is suitable for experienced cyclists only (01768 840400; [cycleactive.co.uk](http://cycleactive.co.uk)).

### ● BEST FOR SOLITUDE

**The Quietest Cycle Tour Under the Sun, two nights from £170 pp**

This relaxing weekend break is based around the border village of Clun, Shropshire, with its traditional inns, tearoom and castle. The gentle ride takes place along

the river valleys and into the Clun Hills (01568 770755; [wheelywonderfulcycling.co.uk](http://wheelywonderfulcycling.co.uk)).

### ● BEST FOR BEGINNERS

**East Lothian Escape, two to seven nights from £150 pp**

If you’re wary of booking a holiday that’s all about the bike, this fixed-base package will take the pressure off. There are various accommodation options, from self-catering holiday homes to luxury spa hotels, and you decide how much cycling you can handle (07932 676841; [2wheel-tours.com](http://2wheel-tours.com)).

### ● BEST FOR SCENERY

**Snowdonia Beano, seven nights from £600 pp**

Acclaimed as one of the world’s top 25 cycling holidays, this on-road tour allows you to explore the rugged, panoramic beauty of North Wales. Highlights include the Menai Strait, Snowdonia National Park and the castle town of Caernarfon, with an optional visit to Portmeirion. Even the bike shed boasts one of the best views in Britain! (01982 560471; [bicycle-beano.co.uk](http://bicycle-beano.co.uk)).



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# In good HEALTH

Boost your wellbeing the natural way with our monthly round-up of the latest news from the world of health and beauty



## SOAK UP SOME RAYS

Mad dogs and Englishmen, it seems, are right – we should all be out in the midday sun. Well, for ten minutes at least. The latest advice from Cancer Research, is to get around 15 minutes of sun exposure without sunscreen three times a week in summer. This is because sunshine is needed for our bodies to produce vitamin D – a deficiency of which has been linked to diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers. Of course, safe sun messages still apply but it sounds like a good reason to get out for a lunchtime walk now that the days are getting longer.



## IN THE MOOD

If you find the aroma of tea simultaneously relaxing and reviving, try Jo Malone's Limited Edition Tea Fragrance Blends (£34 for 30ml, [jomalone.co.uk](http://jomalone.co.uk)). The collection of colognes includes warming, invigorating Assam & Grapefruit, light and delicate Earl Grey & Cucumber and refreshing Fresh Mint. And you can combine with other Jo Malone fragrances, body oils or bath oils to create your individual scented statement.

## FAVOURITE FIND

Plump up fine lines instantly with Vichy Neovadiol Lips and Eyes Contour (£18.70, 15ml). Combining mineral-rich spa water with renowned dermatological ingredients, it nourishes skin with moisture to help reduce the signs of ageing.



## COUNTRY CURE

Whenever I suffer from any kind of stomach upset, I drink an infusion of fresh thyme in hot water to rehydrate and soothe painful cramps.

SUSAN WRIGHT,  
EASTBOURNE



## THREE OF THE BEST...NATURAL ENERGY BOOSTERS

### Focus, Energise, Create

(£6 for 20ml, [saskiasfloweressences.com](http://saskiasfloweressences.com)). A combination of flower essences from a Cotswold-based company, this claims to help give you the kickstart needed to embark on a new project, plus the creativity and drive to see it through.



### Sharpham Park Fruit Granola bar

(£1.65, [sharphampark.com](http://sharphampark.com)). Made with organic spelt, which is easier to digest than wheat, this cereal bar also contains apricots and seeds for a long-lasting energy boost. Perfect with a mid-morning drink or afternoon snack.



### Boots Re-energise Boost tablets

(£9.19 for 20 tablets). Forget the double espresso for a quick pick-me-up and try one of these tablets made with guarana, a natural source of caffeine, coupled with B vitamins to help your body release energy from food.



For more health advice, visit [allaboutyou.com/diet-wellbeing](http://allaboutyou.com/diet-wellbeing) and [netdoctor.co.uk](http://netdoctor.co.uk)





# Learn a *country* craft

Create your own beautifully patterned knitwear with our latest book

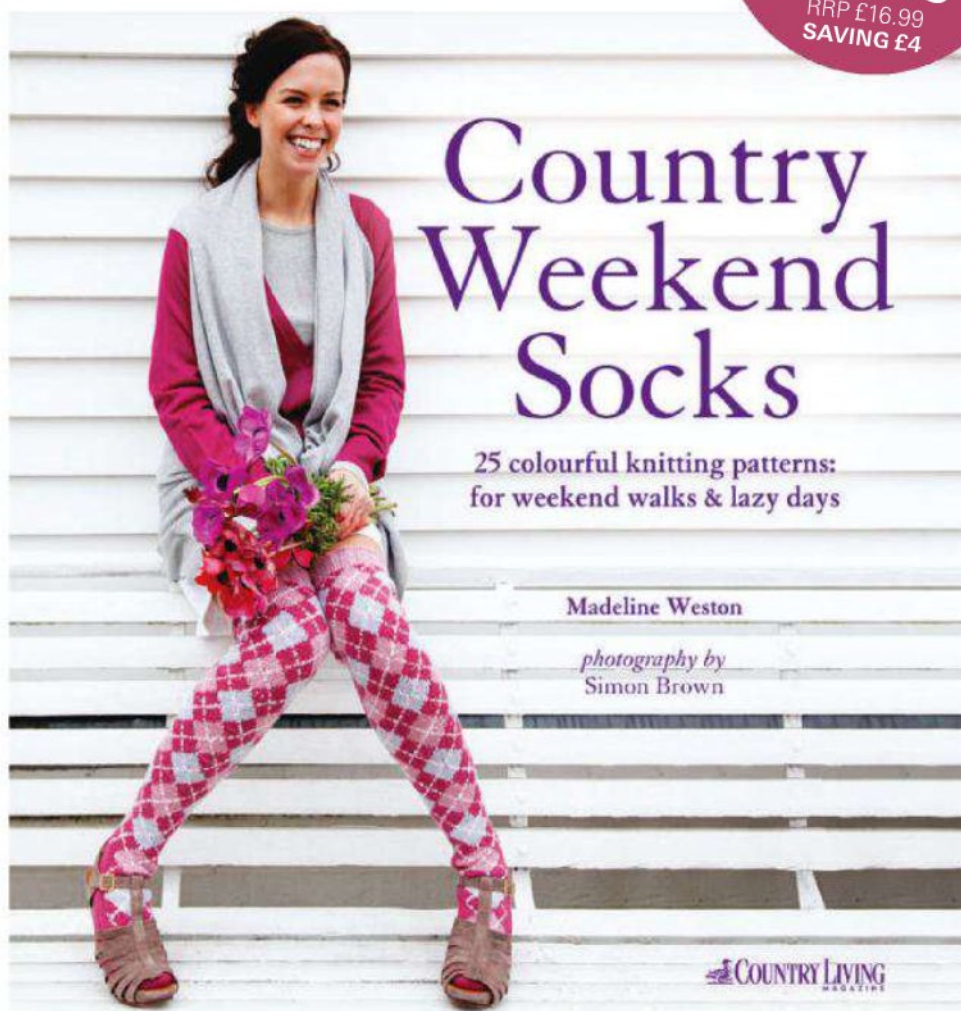
## OUR BRAND NEW TITLE,

*Country Weekend Socks*, written by Madeline Weston, celebrates the revival of hand-knitting with a collection of 25 classic patterns, reflecting the rich heritage of traditional British knitwear. With both long and short styles in wool and cotton, there is a wonderful range of sock patterns to suit every occasion – to wear with walking boots, classic tweeds, light summer dresses and even pyjamas. The designs include Fair Isle, intricate lace, multicoloured and gansey stitch patterns, while the wonderful palette of colours take its cue from coast and countryside.

Author Madeline Weston opened The Scottish Merchant in Covent Garden in 1970, which for 20 years was known as *the* place in London for buying beautifully made, authentic garments sourced from all over the British Isles. She has done extensive research into traditional knitting patterns and is an authority on the subject. Her earlier book, *Country Weekend Knits*, is also a CL title.

● CL readers can order a copy of *Country Weekend Socks* at the special price of £12.99 (rrp £16.99) including free p&p.

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# Special offers for CL readers

## Farrow & Ball reader day at Charleston farmhouse, Sussex



Charleston was the home and country meeting place of the writers, painters and intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group. The interior was painted by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, and forms a wonderful example of their decorative style.

CL readers can experience the unique charm of Charleston on our special reader days on 20 and 21 June. Morning coffee will be followed by a talk on the history of the house by curator Wendy Hitchmough and then a guided tour. After a seasonal lunch using local produce, you will be given a short talk about colour in the home by Joa Studholme, international colour consultant to Farrow & Ball. You will also be able to take part in a painting workshop, led by local artist Sophie Coryndon, to create your own, Charleston-inspired, wooden tea tray to take home. Plus, there will be plenty of time to look around the beautiful walled gardens and browse the Charleston shop, which has a range of original ceramics, painted furniture, textiles, jewellery, clothes and new and rare books relating to Charleston and the Bloomsbury group. Tickets cost £55 and include a goodie bag.

● **To book**, call 020 7439 5264 or send a cheque payable to Country Living to Susie Bates, Farrow & Ball event, 72 Broadwick Street, London W1F 9EP, stating which date you would prefer.

## Win a cycling holiday in France

Award-winning tour operator Cycling for Softies has been helping people discover the delights of France for 30 years, with tailor-made itineraries in ten regions. This month, you could win a three-night break in a Michelin-starred, 12th-century château in the Loire Valley. The stay includes transfers from Tours or St Pierre des Corps station, buffet breakfasts and three five-course dinners with wine. You will also be able to explore the area on two wheels and enjoy wine tasting at a local vineyard. Plus, CL readers will receive a 15% discount on all 2011 holidays. Call 0161 248 8282 or visit [cyclingforsofties.co.uk](http://cyclingforsofties.co.uk), quoting CLMAG when booking.

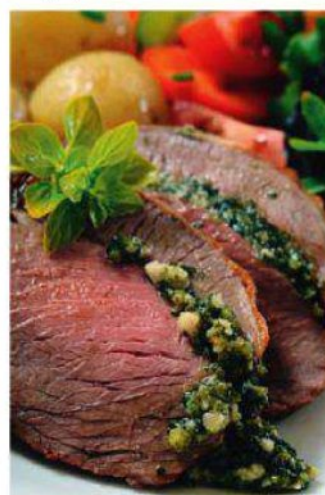
● **To enter**, call 0906 757 8700\*, or text CL CYCLING to 87088\*\* followed by a space then your contact details, or send your details to GVCN LL09687, The Data Solutions Centre, Workop S80 2RT.\*\*\* Closes 30 April 2011.



**TERMS AND CONDITIONS** This offer must be taken between 1 May and 1 October 2011. Travel not included. The nearest airport is Tours (with flights from Stansted). \*Calls cost 77p per minute from BT landlines, plus network charges and should last no longer than 2 minutes. Calls from mobiles and other networks may cost more. \*\*Texts cost £1.50 plus your usual network operator rate. If you phone or text your entry after the advertised closing date, you will not be entered but you will be charged. Winners will be selected at random after the closing date. Lines close midnight 30 April 2011. SP: Telecom Express [telecomexpress.co.uk](http://telecomexpress.co.uk).

## Save on delicious British lamb

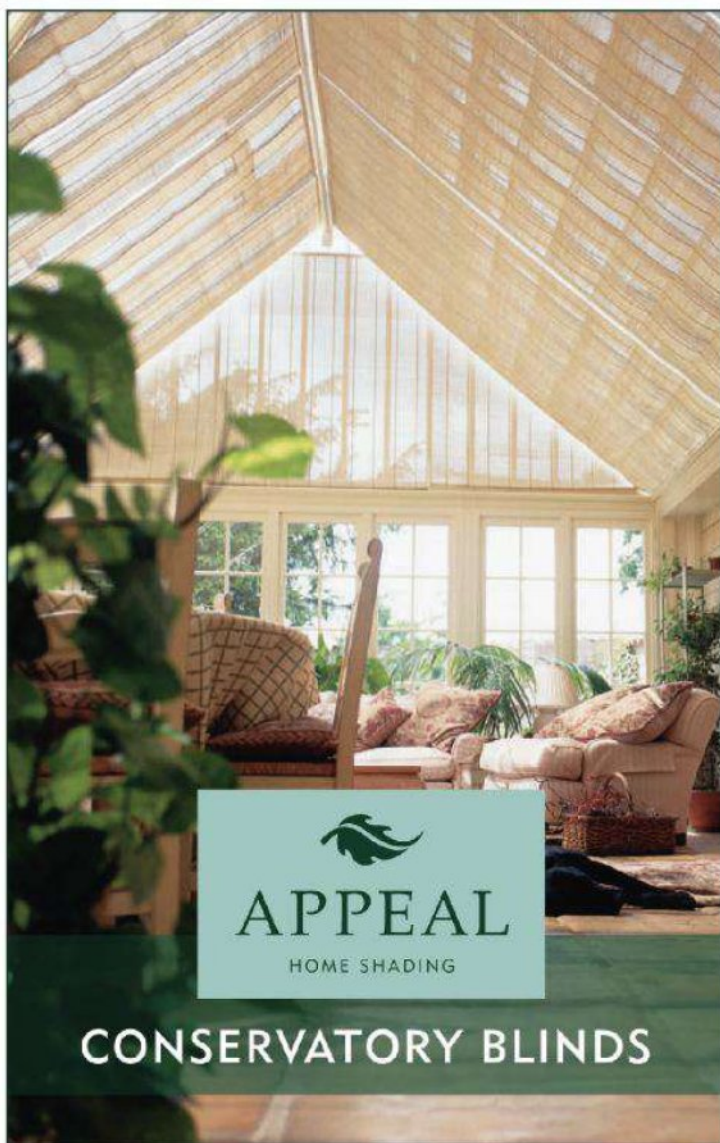
What better way to celebrate the new season than with a succulent joint of British lamb? Devon meat producers Pipers Farm is offering CL readers a 15% discount on its delicious range, which also includes Red Ruby beef, pork from Wessex



Saddleback pigs, goose and venison. Based in Cullompton near Exeter, Pipers Farm rears all its animals slowly without the use of additives and the meat is hung for up to a month to develop tenderness and flavour. For recipe ideas, visit [pipersfarm.com/recipes](http://pipersfarm.com/recipes).

● **To order**, call 01392 881380 and quote the code living4 or visit [pipersfarm.com](http://pipersfarm.com) and enter the same code at the checkout to claim your discount. Offer is available from 10 March to 30 April 2011. 🐏





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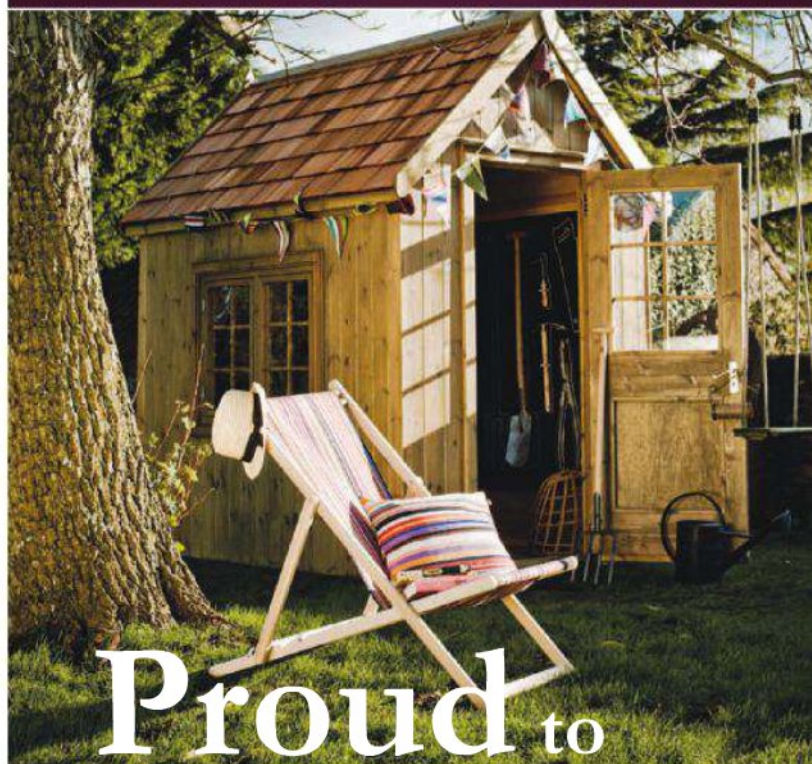
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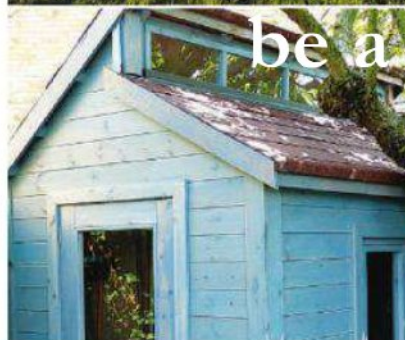
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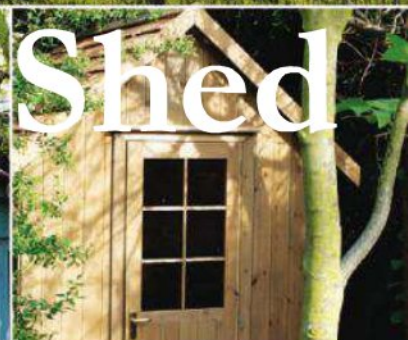
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Brighten up your kitchen or dining table with this jolly country-style gingham tablecloth. Square napkins are available in the same bold check and matching tie-back seat cushions complete the look. Made from hard-wearing, yarn-dyed, woven cotton, these practical accessories look great, wash after wash. Available in a choice of red, green or blue.

**CL price from £6.99** (see right), plus £1.99 p&p

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137cm x 178cm	<b>£9.99</b>
137cm x 229cm	<b>£12.99</b>
178cm x 229cm	<b>£14.99</b>
152cm round	<b>£9.99</b>
<b>Set of four napkins</b> (45cm x 45cm)	<b>£6.99</b>
<b>Set of four seat pads</b> (35.5cm x 38cm)	<b>£22.99</b>



### PERFECT PICNIC TABLE

Great for entertaining both indoors and out, this table can seat up to eight people but folds away quickly for easy storage. The practical plastic wipe-clean top and steel folding legs make it ideal for springtime picnics. It measures 75cm x 76cm x 183cm and folds down to 10cm x 76cm x 92cm.

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The single duvet set comes with one Oxford pillowcase, while double, king and superking sets come with two. Matching, lined curtains (measuring 168cm x 183cm) and quilted bedspreads are also available. Made from a linen-mix, all items are machine washable.

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King	£99.99	£199.99	£100
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Suitable for both experienced seamstresses and beginners, this simple-to-use Toyota SPA15R sewing machine is ideal for a range of tasks, including creating soft furnishings, making craft projects or running up your own clothes. The single-dial control enables you to select from 15 different stitch types and the built-in Quick Adviser means you don't need to refer to the manual for guidance.

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Price includes free extension table for larger projects, worth £22, and a three-year guarantee. **CL price £99.99** (usually £239), plus £2.99 p&p



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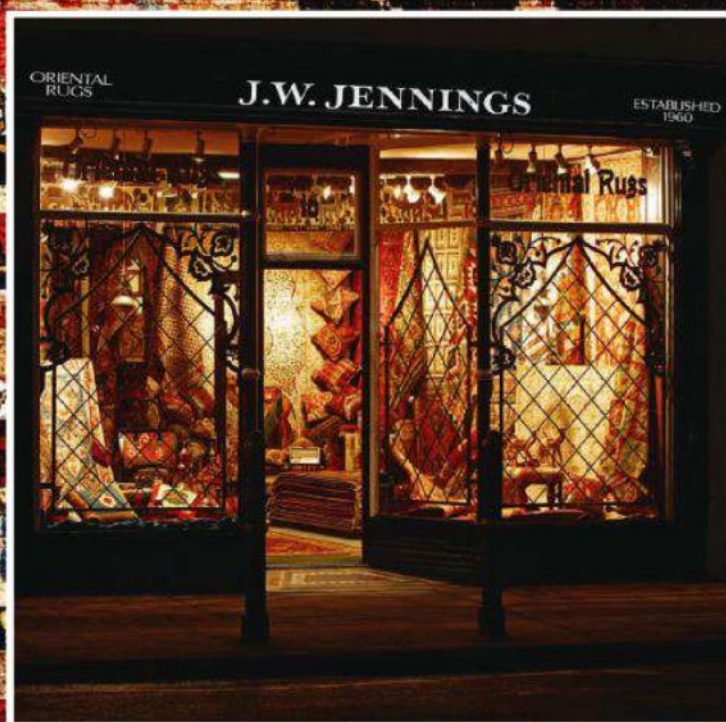
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Make light work of preparing a range of delicious dishes with the iconic Magimix 4200

A favourite with keen cooks and professional chefs, the Magimix 4200 food processor has been designed with a host of helpful features to make food preparation easy and enjoyable. Ideal for liquidising, chopping, slicing or kneading and with a soup capacity of 1.3 litres, the mixer has a shatterproof three-litre Lexan bowl, a mini and midi bowl, stainless-steel Sabatier blades and discs, a dough blade and spatula, as well as a citrus press and egg whisk. In addition, there is a free Magimix recipe book, full of tempting dishes to inspire you. Each machine comes with a 12-year motor and three-year parts guarantee. Available in a choice of stylish white, chrome or satin finishes.

- White **£199.99** (plus £3.99 p&p)
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Perfect for storing your homemade cakes and puddings, this clear, airtight plastic 12.6-litre cake box is ideal for large round or square cakes. There is a handy date dial so that you can keep an eye on how many days have elapsed since baking day and it has a useful inbuilt carry handle and a freshness tray inside, which allows the cake to be lifted off the base of the box easily. It is dishwasher-, microwave- and freezer-safe.

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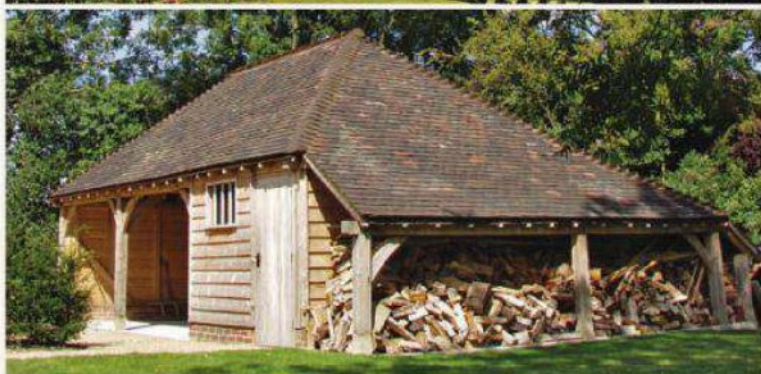


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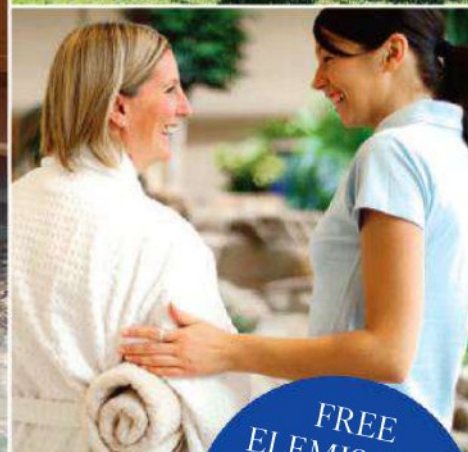
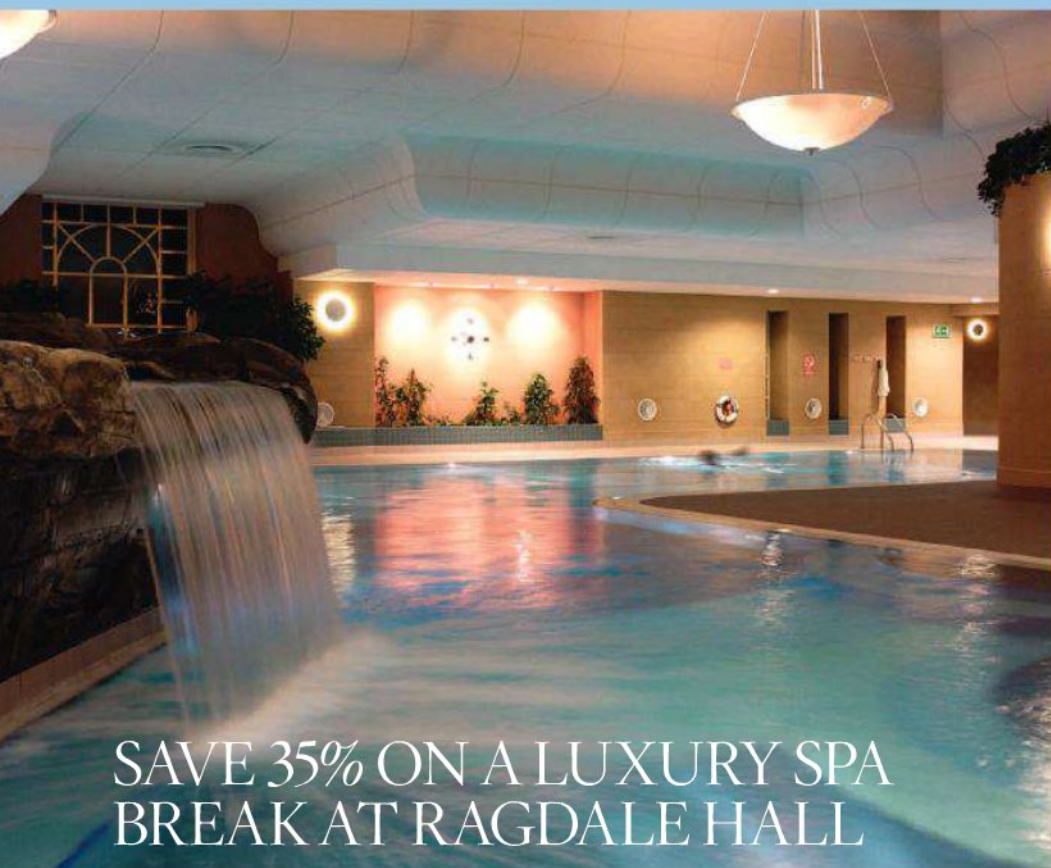
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# BY POST



## SAVE 35% ON A LUXURY SPA BREAK AT RAGDALE HALL

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Treat yourself to a relaxing stay at Ragdale Hall Health Hydro and Thermal Spa in the beautiful Leicestershire countryside. Unwind in the main pool, indulge in one of a range of pampering treatments or invigorate your senses in the Thermal Spa, with a choice of 12 luxurious heat and water experiences. Visit [ragdalehall.co.uk](http://ragdalehall.co.uk) for more information on facilities and treatments. *Country Living* readers will pay just £318.50 per person (usually £490) for a two-night break. The exclusive package includes:

- Check-in at 3pm into a superior room/ twin/double/triple for two nights
- Two 40-minute treatments each: choose from body massage, prescription facial, custom manicure or moisturising lavender body treatment
- Full use of spa facilities, plus the Thermal Spa, all classes and gym
- Free Elemis gift worth £26.90 per person, which contains Exotic Cream

Moisturising Mask (15ml), Papaya Enzyme Peel (15ml), Rehydrating Rosepetal Cleanser (50ml) and Rehydrating Ginseng Toner (50ml)

- All meals during your stay (breakfast, lunch and three-course dinner)
- Skincare consultation (suitable for men, too)
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- Late check-out at 2pm

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**TO BOOK** call 01664 433013\* and quote ref Country Living April 11 when booking to claim your discount, or visit [ragdalehall.co.uk/cl.cfm](http://ragdalehall.co.uk/cl.cfm).\*\* ▷

[allaboutyoushop.com](http://allaboutyoushop.com)

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS** This offer is subject to availability. Break must be taken before 23 December 2011. Offer is based on two people sharing a superior twin/double/triple room for two nights. Cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Offer is valid Sunday to Thursday only. Over 16s only. Supply and fulfilment of bookings is with Ragdale Hall Health Hydro, Ragdale Village, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE14 3PB. \*Calls are charged at the standard BT landline rate. Calls from mobiles and other networks may cost more.

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2 x 20-piece set	<b>£129.98</b>	£310	£180
Set of four 17cm plates	<b>£22.99</b>	£24.99	£2
Sugar box and creamer	<b>£24.99</b>	£29.99	£5
Set of four china mugs	<b>£24.99</b>	£29.99	£5

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS** Subject to availability. Please allow up to 21 days for delivery. Offer available to UK mainland only. For overseas orders, please call for a quotation. If dissatisfied, return unused within seven days for a full refund. \*Calls to 0845 numbers will cost no more than 4p per minute from a BT landline; calls from mobiles and other networks may cost more. Supply and fulfilment of orders by Timscris Ltd, PO Box 250, Rochester, Kent ME1 9AJ.

**TO ORDER** call 0845 166 4024\* and quote **CLV95**, or send a cheque, made payable to Country Living, to Country Living Royal Worcester Offer **CLV95**, PO Box 250, Rochester, Kent ME1 9AJ. Or place your order online at [allaboutyoushop.com/clv95](http://allaboutyoushop.com/clv95).\*\* ▷

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# Order our *beautiful* bed linen

Re-create the *Country Living* look in your own home this season with the three fresh and stylish designs from our new spring range

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RANGE



**VINTAGE RIBBON** Pure cotton percale decorated with delicate and charming floral ribbonwork.



**VINTAGE LINEN** Linen-rich throw and cushion cover with scalloped-edge lace embroidery.



**VINTAGE ROSE** Inspired by an old French print, this design features a fine shirt stripe overlaid with a floral bouquet in an elegant raspberry red on crisp cotton percale.

PRODUCT	VINTAGE ROSE (pure cotton percale)	VINTAGE RIBBON (pure cotton percale)	VINTAGE LINEN (linen mix)
Single duvet cover	£65	£65	n/a
Double duvet cover	£75	£75	n/a
King duvet cover	£85	£85	n/a
Superking duvet cover	£95	£95	n/a
Oxford pillowcase (pair)	£30	£34	n/a
Standard pillowcase (pair)	n/a	£34	n/a
Cushion cover (30cm x 40cm)	£11	£17	n/a
Throw (110cm x 200cm)	n/a	n/a	£45
Cushion cover (30cm x 50cm)	n/a	n/a	£13

To view the full range, visit [www.designerbedlinen.co.uk](http://www.designerbedlinen.co.uk)

**TO ORDER** Call 0845 166 4024\* and quote reference CLV108, or send a cheque made payable to Country Living to: Country Living Bedding, PO Box 250, Rochester, Kent ME1 9AJ, or visit [www.allaboutyoushop.com/CLV108](http://www.allaboutyoushop.com/CLV108).\*\* Offer closes 31 July 2011. 📧

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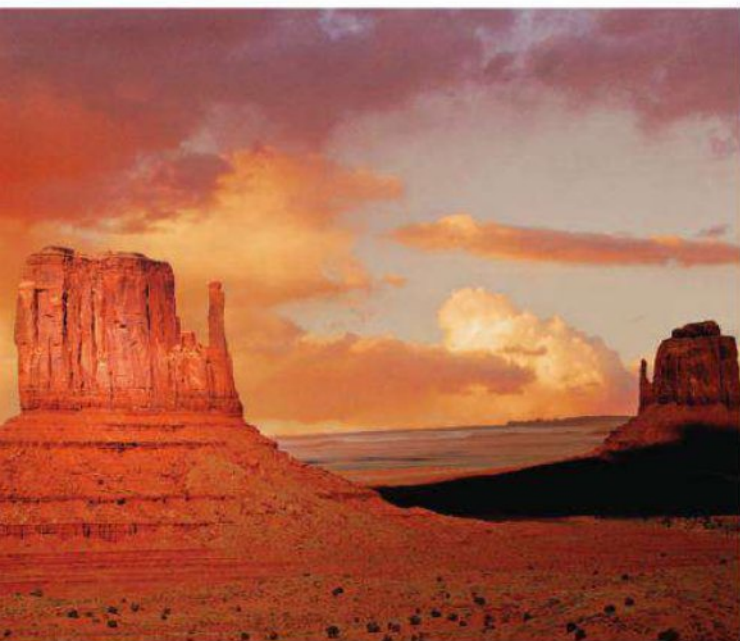
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**Terms and conditions** Prices are per person based on two sharing a twin/double room and include flights, transfers and accommodation. Savings based on 10% of tour cost shown in brochure. Prices shown in offer include discount. †Door-to-door transfers valid if you live within 100 miles of the airport of your choice. Only available on new bookings from 1-30 April 2011 and cannot be claimed retrospectively. Cannot be combined with the standard Pay in Full Discount featured on page 14 of the Milestones brochure. These holidays are operated by Milestones Tours ABTA Y0569, ATOL 9774, a company which is independent of The National Magazine Company. \*Calls to 0845 numbers will cost no more than 4p per minute from a BT landline; calls from mobiles and other networks may cost more.

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# Win a classic *Airstream* caravan

This month, we're offering readers the chance to win £50,000 for a vintage-style trailer

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**FIRST PRIZE** £50,000 cash to spend, plus ten runner-up prizes of £500.

## WIN £10,000 CASH TO SPEND

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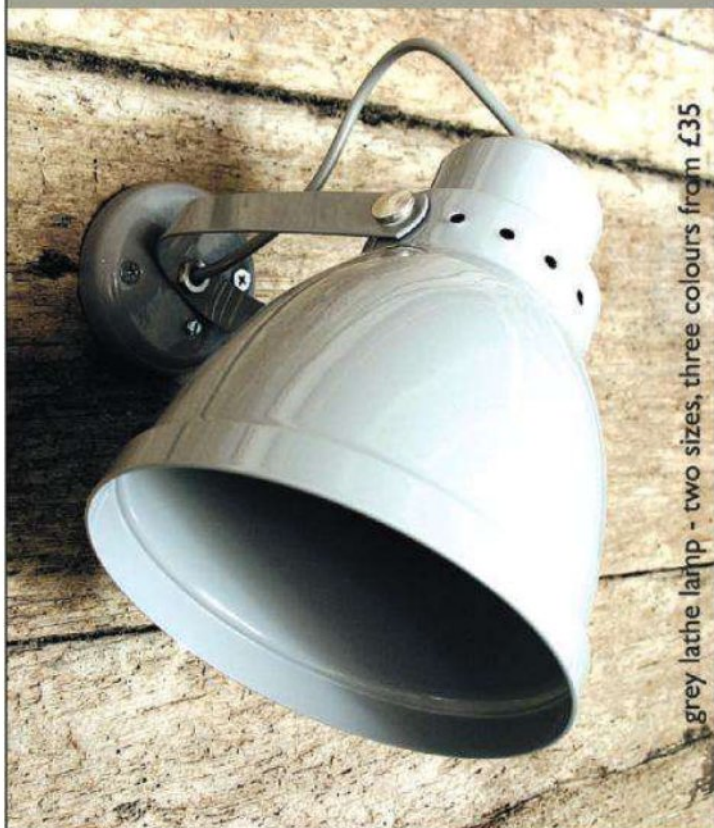
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● To find a range of beautiful Airstream trailers, visit [airstream europe.co.uk](http://airstream europe.co.uk) and [vintage airstreams.co.uk](http://vintage airstreams.co.uk).

\*Calls cost £1.02 per minute from BT landlines and should last no longer than 3 minutes. \*\*Text entries cost £1.50 per message; you'll receive two messages per prize line. Total cost to enter via SMS is £3 plus your standard network charge. **Prize claims:** If you have a winning number, take a photocopy of the front cover of your April issue of Country Living Magazine (keep the original safe). Send the copy with covering letter by recorded delivery to Emma Harding, Country Living April Claim, Telecom Express, PO BOX 5639 London W1A 2HN to arrive no later than 9 May 2011. **Postal entry:** To receive a list of winning numbers by post: send an s.a.e. to Country Living, April Inkjet PO Box 10220, Sutton Coldfield, B76 1ZH to arrive by 15 April 2011. You will need to send an s.a.e. per prize line. No purchase necessary. For a free front cover send an s.a.e. to Country Living April to the above PO Box address, to arrive by 15 April 2011. Entries submitted via consolidation organisations will not be accepted. **Rules of entry:** Competition closes midnight 30 April 2011. Entrants must be over 18. No entrant may win more than one prize. Prize claims will not be accepted after 9 May 2011. Proof of posting is not proof of receipt. Claimants must supply their original magazine cover on request. The competition is open to residents of the UK (including Northern Ireland). Employees (and relatives) of The National Magazine Company, Telecom Express and associated companies are not eligible to enter. The winner must be willing to take part in post-event publicity if necessary. The National Magazine Company retains the discretion not to award prizes to claimants (or consortiums) who in the opinion of the National Magazine Company, have not entered into the spirit of the competition. Should more prizes be claimed than are available in any prize category for any reason or claimed as a result of a technical error, a simple draw may take place for the prize. The judges' (including the editor's) decision is final. Images are for representational purposes only. **Data protection** \*\*\*By entering you agree that The National Magazine Company Ltd, directly, or via its agents, may contact you by mail, e-mail, SMS or phone with offers, products and services reflecting your preferences. If you don't want offers from The National Magazine Company at the time of entering text OUT1; if you don't want offers from third parties send OUT2. For our data policy, see [natmags.co.uk/dp](http://natmags.co.uk/dp).



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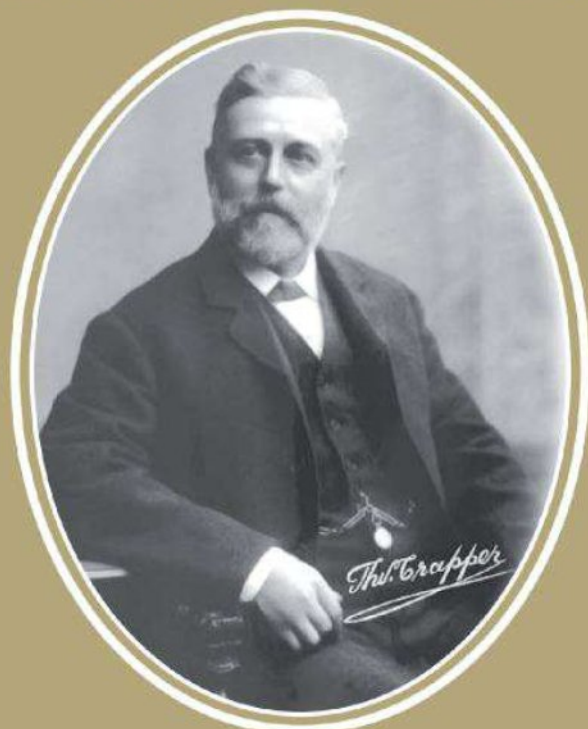
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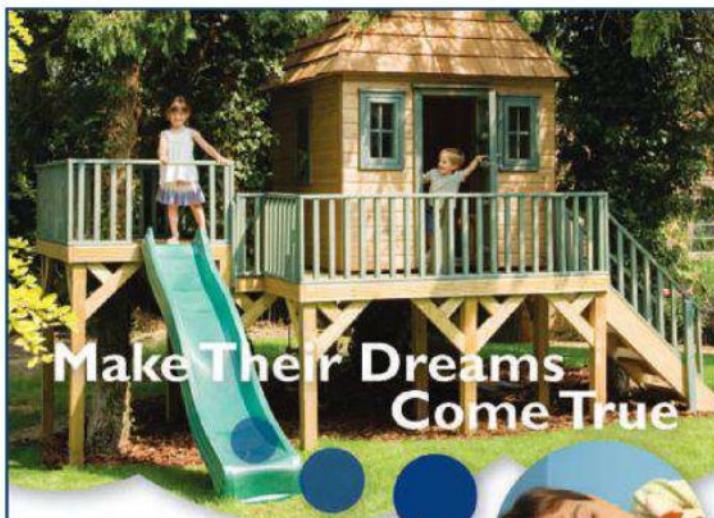


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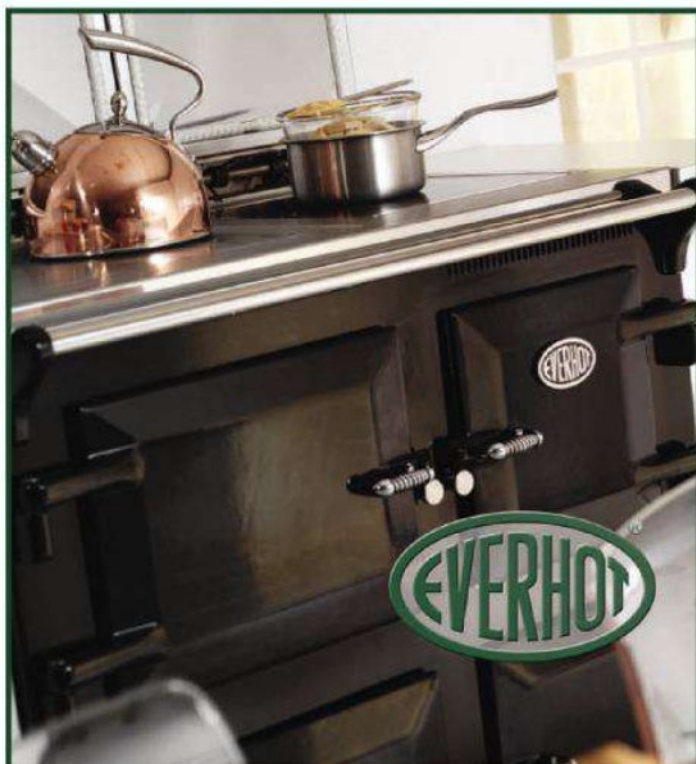
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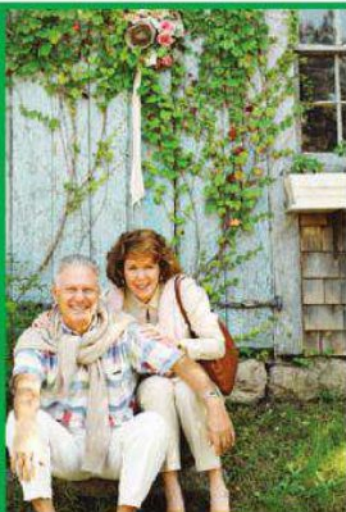
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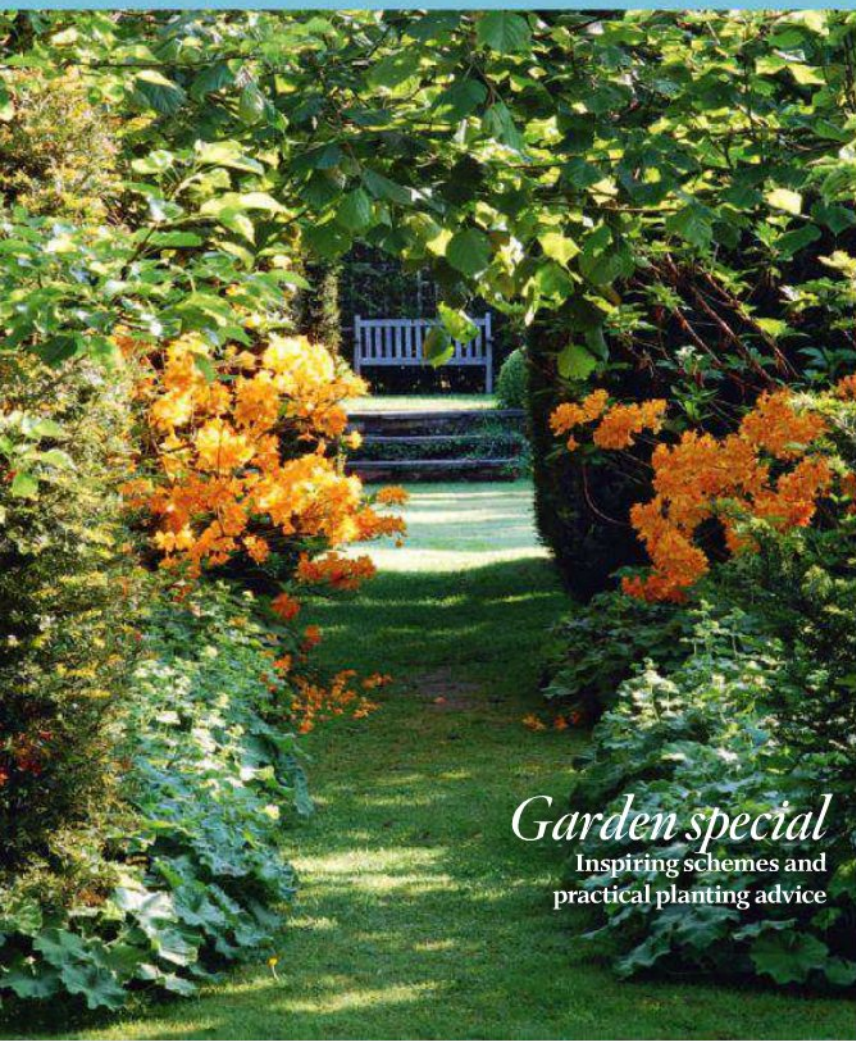


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● For a chance to win, call 0906 757 8715\*, text CL POB to 87088\*\* or send your details to GVCNLL09871, The Data Solutions Centre, Worksop S80 2RT\*\*\*. Closes 30 April 2011. For more details, visit [prideofbritainhotels.com](http://prideofbritainhotels.com).

Terms and conditions: Prize is subject to availability until end of November 2011. Sunday-Thursday inclusive.

## Beautiful beehive necklace



Award-winning British jeweller and CL Fair exhibitor Scarlett is offering subscribers this silver beehive necklace, usually £59, for the special price of £44 (plus p&p) – a generous 25% discount. The intricately detailed hive is part of a collection by Scarlett that is designed to raise awareness of declining bee numbers.

● To order, call 0845 833 1571 or visit [scarlettjewellery.com](http://scarlettjewellery.com) to see the range, entering code CL1120 at the checkout to claim your discount. Offer ends 30 April 2011.

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The Ludlow Bag Company creates handmade designer bags made using locally sourced or recycled materials – each one is unique. To mark the launch of its leather Vogue handbag (shown), lined with a complementary material, the company is offering a 20% discount on the entire range, so subscribers can buy this striking bag for £120 (normally £150) including p&p.

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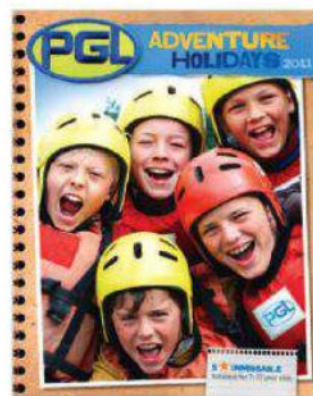
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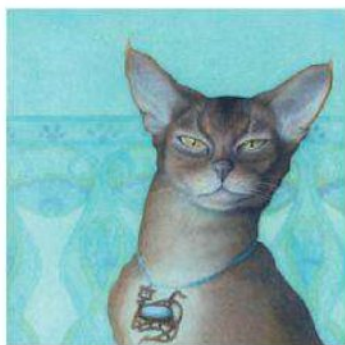
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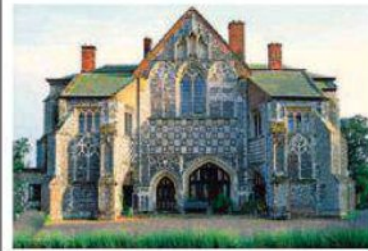


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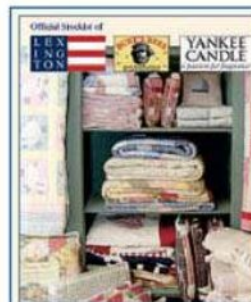
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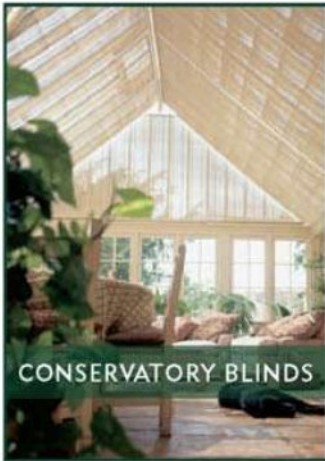
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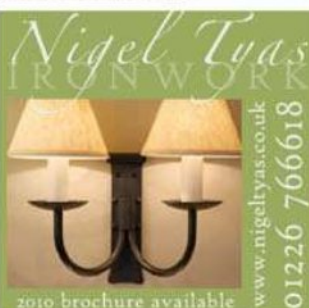
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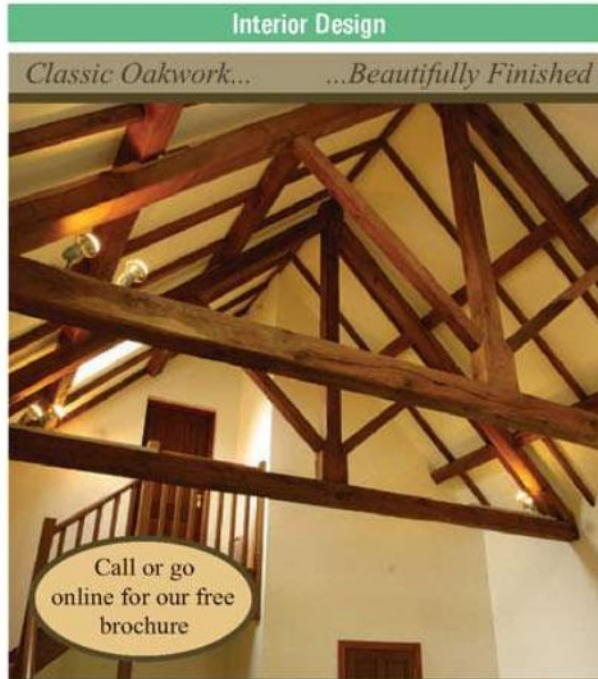
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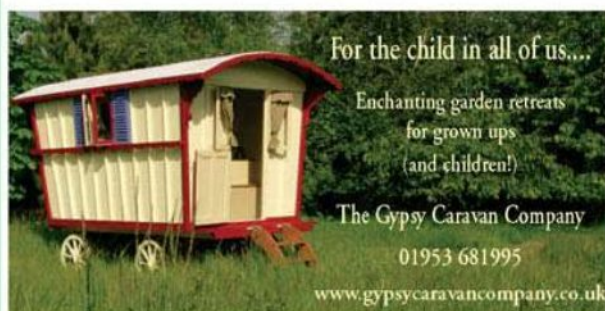
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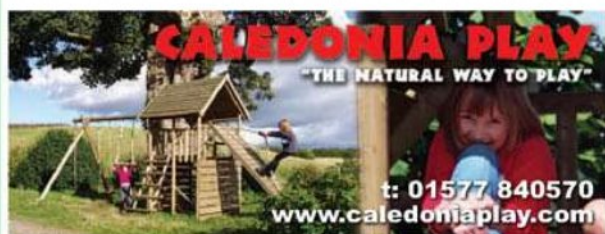
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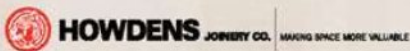
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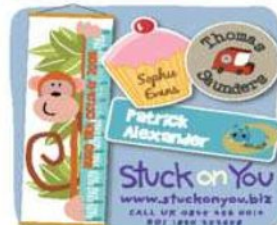
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# My country memories

**I DISCOVERED** that the art of great food is great ingredients when I was growing up in North Yorkshire – wonderfully fresh produce was right on our doorstep. We lived in a farmhouse on the Castle Howard estate where my father worked as promotions manager. Our home came with his job but we were also given some land on which Dad set up a smallholding. We raised Middle White pigs, kept chickens and even grazed a herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle. All our food was usually grown or reared within sight of the kitchen window.

When you lead a proper country life, you've all got to muck in so, from when we were both still quite small, my younger sister Charlotte and I helped with everything from cleaning out the hens to taking the pigs to market. At school, half the kids in our class were from farming backgrounds so it was completely normal. When it came to home-time, we weren't racing back so that we could play computer games, but to change out of our uniforms as quickly as possible so that we could get outside into the fresh air.

I've always been very outdoorsy, and even now I can't think of anything worse than sitting at home on my day off. I was one of those children who was constantly covered in mud from playing in the fields around our house. I'm a big dog lover and back then I had a golden retriever called Ginny – she went absolutely everywhere with me; today I have a Clumber spaniel called Fudge who really is my best friend.

Around harvest time we used to make dens in the bales and create tunnels and build ramps for us to crawl through and clamber over. We'd also go beating and shooting for game. I began driving tractors when I was ten and, a little later, my friend Philip and I would ride up and down the fields on old motorbikes – his was in better condition than mine and when I reached a steep hill I had to get off and push.

When I wasn't out and about, I learned a lot about cooking from my family. My mum was a great cook and she always made everything from scratch – we didn't own a microwave let alone eat any ready meals. To this day, hers is the best roast beef and Yorkshire pudding I have ever tasted – it would rival any chef's. I started helping her with the cooking and chopping from a very early age and it was this experience that led to working



Growing up on a smallholding in North Yorkshire has given chef **James Martin** an appreciation of the rhythms of rural life and the flavours of home-grown food

in professional kitchens for a couple of hours a week. My grandmother, who lived in York, was a wonderful pastry cook. It used to take her about half an hour to make it and I remember her sitting with her old mixing bowl rubbing butter and flour together while she watched *Coronation Street*. It was the kind of pastry that would dissolve in your mouth. When she died I asked for her mixing bowl and still use it today to make pastry just the way she did.

My grandfather was a great gardener and had an allotment where he grew pretty much everything. One of my most vivid memories is walking into his greenhouse and smelling the tomatoes. That scent is still very nostalgic for me, and when I bought my house in Hampshire the first thing I did was build a greenhouse so I could grow my own.

The country is truly in my blood. I didn't leave until I was 18 when I had to come down to London for work – there weren't many opportunities for chefs in Yorkshire in those days. I decided to settle in Hampshire for the beautiful villages, countryside and coast, and it's still easy for me to get into London for work. It's often said that rural life happens at a slower pace than that in the city but I disagree.

I also think work is far harder in the country. People don't appreciate how much effort goes into just putting potatoes on your plate. It takes an awful lot of dedication from growers who often don't make much of a living out of it. I admire anyone who works the land because it's not an easy life.

I've got a big enough garden to be pretty much self-sufficient in all my fruit and veg so there's never any need to go to the supermarket. From mulberries, apples, cherries and plums to aubergines, potatoes and tomatoes, I grow bucket-loads. Work means there isn't much free time these days, but whenever I do have the chance I'm out there with my fork, working the soil. I have a gardener, Geoff, who comes in to help me because I'm not Alan Titchmarsh and am still learning. So I tend to do a bit of digging and planting, then he comes along to sort out the mess. 🍷

*James Martin presents Saturday Kitchen on ITV and is appearing this spring in the Great British Food Revival on BBC2. The accompanying book (£20) is available for the special price of £15.99 with free p&p from [allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk](http://allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk) or call 0871 803 6764.*

INTERVIEW BY CATHERINE BUTLER



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# Kitchen Table TALENTS

50 WAYS TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR HOME-GROWN SKILLS



PLUS expert advice on turning your hobby into a business





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I can't speak a foreign language or play a musical instrument, I'm not the best at baking a cake or arranging flowers but I have researched my family tree, am pretty good at growing my own vegetables and I trained my dog.

Everyone has at least one skill, honed at the kitchen table: something you're good at or have a gift for. It's what gives you the most satisfaction, a certain pleasure in knowing you do it well. It is often the basis for a hobby and this is where your passion can start to grow. Feed it and learn more, put it to good use in the community or find a way to earn money from it, perhaps even taking the big, life-changing step of turning it into your own business.

Here we've suggested 50 kitchen table talents and pointers to making the most of them. If you want to take your skill from pastime to full-time, Emma Jones, our home-based-business expert, has put together some advice to get you started, along with a directory of useful contacts.

We'd love to hear about your particular passion and how you have taken it further, so log on to the forum at [allaboutyou.com/talent](http://allaboutyou.com/talent) and tell us. And when you're running your photography, cat-sitting or decorating business, spare a moment to drop us a line!

*Lisa Sykes*

Lisa Sykes, Features Editor, *Country Living* Magazine

PS If you've a flair for designing, drawing, writing, sewing, cooking or gardening, you could enter our Kitchen Table Talent Awards: see page 16 or visit [allaboutyou.com/talent](http://allaboutyou.com/talent)

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## 1 DECORATING YOUR HOME

Are you always plotting how to make your home more stylish? Do you spend hours hunting for the perfect paint or piece of furniture to create the country look? Take your skill to another level by planning out mood boards of your ideas to learn what works and why, or sign up for an interior decorating course with KLC School of Design ([klc.co.uk](http://klc.co.uk)).



## 2 MAKING TECHNOLOGY WORK

Does the Freeview box or laptop hold no fear for you? Do you find manuals easy to understand? Many people have a problem with technology so that's where your talent comes in. Use your skills to barter – install someone's software or set up their remote control in return for something you can't do. You will soon build up a reputation and may even kick-start a skill-swap network.







**3 ARRANGING FLOWERS**  
If you can already create a beautiful bouquet, find inspiring new designs in *The Complete Guide to Flower Arranging* by Jane Packer (Dorling Kindersley, £13.99) or go on a course, from a bridal masterclass to a Christmas-themed session ([judith blacklock.com](http://judithblacklock.com)). To help your skill blossom into a business, promote your floral flair to local event organisers, restaurants or offer to provide the blooms for friends' weddings.

**4 SEWING SOFT FURNISHINGS**  
Can you whip up a cushion in no time, create an heirloom quilt or make a pair of curtains? Your skills could lead to a thriving cottage industry, with commissions from those who don't own or know how to use a sewing machine. Alternatively, supply nearby outlets with your wares to test the market or set up shop online at [etsy.com](http://etsy.com). Gain confidence with a qualification from The Association of Master Upholsterers & Soft Furnishers' approved course centres (listed at [upholsterers.co.uk](http://upholsterers.co.uk)).



**5 BAKING A CAKE**  
Is your Victoria sponge a family favourite? Test your talent on a wider audience with a charity fundraising event selling treats to friends and neighbours. If the response is good, start advertising your cakes for sale locally. Widen your repertoire with a course – try Bettys in Yorkshire ([bettys.co.uk](http://bettys.co.uk)) or Cinnamon Square in Hertfordshire ([cinnamonsquare.com](http://cinnamonsquare.com)).





## 6 LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN

To have a natural rapport with children is a great gift. Identify what you are good at and enjoy most – whether carer or teacher, there are volunteering opportunities to further your skills and knowledge, from helping with reading at schools, taking children with special needs on outings, or involvement in sports and youth clubs. Essential paperwork includes clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau and a first-aid qualification. Find out more from the Children's Workforce Development Council at [cwdcouncil.org.uk](http://cwdcouncil.org.uk).

## 7 CLIPPING A HEDGE

Do you clip a mean hedge? Are your shears twitching to shape sundry shrubs? Courses at Langley Boxwood Nursery ([boxwood.co.uk](http://boxwood.co.uk)) teach you how to create a basic ball and more complex spirals and animals. A leaflet door drop locally could provide clipping contracts and soon turn your hobby into a business.



## 8 BEING A FOODIE

You relish the range of artisan cheeses, breads, charcuterie and farm-fresh produce in your area, know which pubs and restaurants serve rare-breed beef and their own lamb and always seek out farm shops and delis wherever you go. You are definitely a foodie. Help others savour these flavours by producing a regional guide or walking tour to introduce people to your favourite local delicacies. An illustrated leaflet or online introduction will draw others to your neighbourhood and create valuable community links.



**9** **RECOGNISING BIRDS**  
The activity at your bird feeders is a constant distraction and you're expert at identifying bursts of song from the hedgerows – it's time to join the British Trust for Ornithology ([bto.org](http://bto.org)). Be trained to identify habitats and to conduct surveys, enjoy sharing experiences with other volunteers at regional conferences and play an active role in the conservation of Britain's wonderful birdlife.



**10** **CARING FOR ANIMALS**  
For the Doctor Dolittles among us, there are numerous ways to make the most of our gift. Animal charities such as RSPCA ([rspca.org.uk](http://rspca.org.uk)) will welcome voluntary help, whether it takes campaigning or cat-grooming form. Or set up your own pet-sitting business where you can earn money by either visiting or staying in the owner's home. Begin by advertising at your local vet's. Make an income from your passion another way by keeping hens and selling their eggs or running an adopt-a-pig scheme where you raise animals on behalf of paying city-based folk.





**11 RIDING A HORSE**  
Are you never happier than when cantering about on horseback? Specialist travel companies offer the chance to take your hobby further afield – how about a ranch holiday in Montana ([ridingholidays.com](http://ridingholidays.com)) or beach riding in Spain ([inthesaddle.com](http://inthesaddle.com))? Closer to home, you could nurture the ability in others by helping the Riding for the Disabled Association ([riding-for-disabled.org.uk](http://riding-for-disabled.org.uk)) or try teaching at a riding school – visit The British Horse Society’s website, [bhs.org.uk](http://bhs.org.uk), for all you need to know.

**12 TEACHING A SKILL**  
‘Those that can, teach’ say the ads. In fact, not all that can, can. It’s a special talent to be able to pass on your own expertise to others, requiring patience, the ability to explain clearly

and to know your audience. Could you be a driving instructor, offer French, cooking or sewing lessons? Test your teaching out by putting a short video on YouTube and ask for feedback. Some subjects demand teaching qualifications while others

are unregulated. If you are on Facebook, there is an application called UduTeach that lets you create an online class on anything you want. Those interested can sign up to your class through the sister programme UduLearn.



## 13 MAKING CARDS

Homemade greetings cards are hard to beat and, while everyone appreciates them, only a few are gifted enough to create shop-worthy efforts. If you have ever considered making birthday, anniversary, good luck or get-well cards to earn some extra cash, or providing a bespoke service for customers for a particular occasion, begin by launching your venture at a small-scale craft fair in your area or village shop. Broaden your range of techniques with a course at a centre such as [craftbarn.org](http://craftbarn.org).



## 14 BAGGING A BARGAIN

If your weekends are spent scouring car boot sales and feeding your eBay habit, you are a bona fide bargain hunter. The trick is making it pay its way: offer to buy and sell for others or source specialist items for collections of vintage frocks, stamps or teapots. Taking a stall yourself at a market will help your sales, marketing, valuation and negotiating skills, improving your buying as well as selling. Read *Make Serious Money on eBay UK* (Nicholas Brealey Publishing, £12.99).



## 15 PUTTING AN OUTFIT TOGETHER

In these days of high-street uniformity, an individual sense of style can be hard to achieve. So if you love creating your own personal look, you may have the makings of a small business up your sleeve. Keep a fashion scrapbook of colours, fabrics and shapes that work for you and devise ideas for friends, too. Pick up tips from the style tutorials on YouTube, start a blog and see where it leads...





## 16 SPEAKING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Being able to communicate fluently in another tongue is a valuable gift that could help you earn or boost a living. Offering one-to-one evening classes locally is a great way to test your teaching skills and use your linguistic ability while keeping the day job. You could even become an interpreter, or if your writing and reading is as good as your oral level, consider training as a translator (Chartered Institute of Linguists runs courses; [iol.org.uk](http://iol.org.uk)).



## 17 PLAYING AN INSTRUMENT

If you always hit the right note, take your gift to the next level and study for a degree (browse those available at [ucas.com](http://ucas.com)). There's a constant demand for piano teachers – and, as providing lessons involves barely any start-up costs, you needn't invest before trying it out. Visit [musiclessonsonline.co.uk](http://musiclessonsonline.co.uk).



## 18 COMPOSING POETRY

Keen to polish up your verse? Try a course ([arvonfoundation.org](http://arvonfoundation.org) or [literaturetraining.com](http://literaturetraining.com)), or workshops and events at the Poetry Library at the Southbank Centre ([poetrylibrary.org.uk](http://poetrylibrary.org.uk)). Subscribe to The Poetry Society ([poetrysociety.org.uk](http://poetrysociety.org.uk)) and you will receive feedback on your work, as well as information on competitions, or look through the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook* (A&C Black, £14.99) for details of publications that accept submissions.





## 19 FINDING ANTIQUES

A home full of timeworn treasures indicates a passion for pieces from the past. Build up your knowledge and eye for the authentic with *Miller's Antiques & Collectables* online guide ([millersantiquesguide.com](http://millersantiquesguide.com)) or help out in a local antiques shop in return for expert guidance. Consider taking a market stall to sell your surplus finds.

## 20 BEING A GOOD LISTENER

Perceptive, tactful, understanding and probably practical, too, are the key qualities here. If your friends and family all pour out their problems, hopes and fears to you, then you have them in spades and can put them to good use in the wider world. Counselling support charities such as Samaritans and

Farm Crisis Network train volunteers to deal with difficulties, or perhaps you could agree to mentor informally a struggling teenager. Read self-help books with a critical eye and choose courses with care. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy ([bacp.co.uk](http://bacp.co.uk)) and The Coaching & Mentoring Network ([coachingnetwork.org.uk](http://coachingnetwork.org.uk)) have more information.





## 21 STICKING TO A BUDGET

You've done your own bookkeeping since pocket-money days, enjoy creating a spreadsheet for a new project and always know how much is in your bank account. This personal accountability is rare and sought-after in these days of spiralling debts. You are ideal treasurer material – see your parish magazine for vacancies at local clubs and societies. If it is numbers that do it for you, why not train as a bookkeeper and offer your services locally through national online networks? Find more information at [bookkeepers.org.uk](http://bookkeepers.org.uk).

## 22 DISCUSSING A BOOK

If you're always animatedly analysing your latest bedtime tome with friends and regularly give them reading lists, you should be running a book club. Recruit a mixed bag of members and produce notes on talking points and key themes. Regional magazines often need critics or you could hone your skills online by contributing to one of the many book review sites such as [booklore.co.uk](http://booklore.co.uk).



## 23 RESEARCHING YOUR FAMILY TREE

Have you traced your own roots back to the 16th century? If so, you have probably already acquired enough research skills to be able to offer your services to others: start small with a nominal fee or bottle of wine per generation uncovered. It requires diligence, persistence and a huge amount of curiosity but you'll soon find friends and neighbours queuing to learn more about their ancestors.





## 24 GROWING VEGETABLES

Put a gift for cultivating edible produce to good use by sharing your abilities with others: volunteer for the gardening therapy charity Thrive ([thrive.org.uk](http://thrive.org.uk)) where your skills can help disabled people grow their own, too. Swap seed and surplus plants or produce with friends, donate to the local fête or leave an honesty box outside your house. You may even be able to sell your surplus to local restaurants.

## 25 PLANNING A MENU

Do you spend hours working out which flavours and textures will create the most delicious combination of dishes for a dinner party? Keep a record

of your successes and annotate your many recipe books with scribbled 'improvements'? Are you always offering to plan meals for community gatherings or for friends who lack inspiration? In time, you may well be able

to provide a complete supper service, devising and cooking meals in neighbourhood homes. Lucy Cooks Cookery School in Yorkshire ([lucycooks.co.uk](http://lucycooks.co.uk)) has a range of inspiring related courses that offer food for thought.



## 26 RUNNING A CAMPAIGN

It's not enough to be passionate about a cause – all the best campaigners combine an evangelical need to spread the word with the essential ability to present the facts clearly. Test your skills by galvanising support for a local issue and hosting a public meeting. Get tips and advice on running a local campaign at [bl.uk/learning/citizenship](http://bl.uk/learning/citizenship) and [explainthatstuff.com](http://explainthatstuff.com).




## 27 TRAINING YOUR DOG

Will your canine come when you call or sit on command? Then you deserve as much praise as your pet. Why not use your ability to get involved with a charity such as Pets As Therapy ([petsastherapy.org](http://petsastherapy.org)) or volunteer as a puppy walker for Guide Dogs ([guidedogs.org.uk](http://guidedogs.org.uk)). Start dog-walking professionally or share your tips by running paid-for classes.







## 28 WRAPPING PRESENTS

Do you delight in a crisp, even fold or a perfectly tied bow? If so, your knack for presenting gifts with the professional touch could be lucrative, especially around Christmas and Easter. Offer not only to wrap, but also provide papers, ribbons and a variety of appealing rustic decorations including herbs or natural finds. Learn from 'gift wrap guru' Jane Means on one of her nationwide courses ([janemeans.co.uk](http://janemeans.co.uk)).

## 29 OFFERING BEAUTY TIPS

You have a justified reputation for picking out the most flattering eyeshadow or lipstick for friends, so go a step further and offer to give them a makeover. Get back to basics by assessing their skin type, too: *The Ultimate Natural Beauty Book* (Kyle Cathie, £14.99) includes more than 100 beauty products to make at home – you may even be inspired to develop your own ranges.



## 30 KEEPING FIT

If you're one of those people who thrive on an exercise regime, could you pass on your enthusiasm by helping to run a class? Improve your health and the environment by joining a British Trust for Conservation Volunteers Green Gym ([btcv.org.uk](http://btcv.org.uk)). Set new personal goals to challenge yourself – enter a race, raise money for charity through a sport you love or branch out with a class in something you've never tried before.



SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • GROW

# THE Kitchen Table TALENT AWARDS

We've always known that *Country Living* readers have got *talent* and now's your chance to prove it! If you can grow, sew or cook, write, draw or make, then you can enter our Kitchen Table Talent Awards.

We want to celebrate your home-grown skills by recognising the best and finding our Kitchen Table Talent of the Year – and we will help to turn their *natural gift* into a successful business

• WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW •





## How to enter

Each entry must be accompanied by a maximum of 500 words (typed) about what you do, how you started and your future dreams. You may enter more than one category (£5 fee per entry for charity). Download the entry form at [allaboutyou.com/talent\\*](http://allaboutyou.com/talent*). Closing date 3 June.



### BEST CRAFTSPERSON

Do you love making things? If you sew, stitch, dye and knit or have a talent for any type of craft, send us photos of up to three items you have made, with instructions on how you made them.

**WIN! A five-day craft course + £100 craft-store vouchers**

### BEST WRITER

Whether you pen poetry or short stories, articles or blogs – send us your work. A maximum of three pieces but no complete books.

**WIN! A writing course + £100 home-office vouchers**

### BEST COOK

If your jam is the best or your cakes are legendary, send in your own recipe and a photo of your cooking and explain what gives it the X factor. Our Food Editor

will make up the shortlisted items for the judges to taste.

**WIN! A cookery school course + £100 kitchenware vouchers**

### BEST GARDENER

Show us your horticultural know-how with an ornamental or kitchen garden of any size you've brought to life. Send in several photos of the finished plot and your plans for the design and the planting.

**WIN! An RHS course + £100 garden-store vouchers**

### BEST ARTIST

Whatever form your art takes – photography, sculpture, oil painting or sketching – send in photos of three pieces of your work and a description of the inspiration behind them.

**WIN! A gallery introduction + £100 art-materials vouchers**

### BEST HOME DESIGNER

If you can come up with dream schemes and colour combinations, send in photos of your renovation, design or decorating projects (before and after snaps if you have them) and a mood board.

**WIN! An interior design course + £100 DIY-store vouchers**

### THE KITCHEN TABLE TALENT OF THE YEAR

The judges will select one entrant to win a package of mentoring, assistance and special deals to help them turn their talent into a business. We will be following their progress online and in the pages of the magazine.

*All the winners will be featured in the September 2011 issue of Country Living. The only criteria is that your talent must not now be your main source of income.*



# 31 IDENTIFYING WILDFLOWERS

If you know your oxlip from your ox-eye daisy, then share your knowledge by leading wildflower walks or perhaps publishing a guide to local flora (visit [blurb.com](http://blurb.com)). Being able to illustrate your botanical notes is even better; members of The Society of Botanical artists ([soc-botanical-artists.org](http://soc-botanical-artists.org)) run courses.



# 32 RECITING VERSE

Did you love learning poetry off by heart at school when others considered it a chore? Is your party piece a perfect rendition of a famous poem? If so, you are probably already blessed with a good memory and a clear, steady speaking voice

but maybe with more training you could turn your gift to your advantage by becoming a performance artist or paid storyteller. Contact one of the UK's 22 leading drama schools for information on speech training and dramatic art ([drama.ac.uk](http://drama.ac.uk)) or visit [speak-easily.com](http://speak-easily.com) for professional voice-training classes and coaching.



## 33 BEING THRIFTY

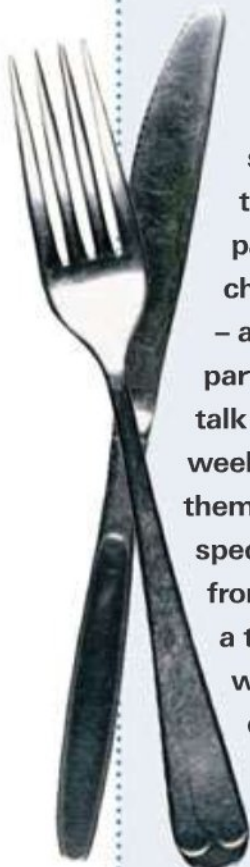
Is waste-not-want-not your personal motto? Good. Thrift is not the sign of a scrooge but a skill to be admired in these recessionary times and a welcome return to the practices of recycling and reusing. This is a talent to develop for the good not only of your household but also of the planet. *The Frugal Life* (£9.99) by Piper Terrett is packed with tips on how to spend less and live more, with practical advice on areas including cooking, fashion, finance and foraging. Find more ideas at [frugal.org.uk](http://frugal.org.uk).



## 34 HOSTING A DINNER PARTY

Is your signature dish always rapturously

received? Do your guests clamour to to be invited back time after time? If so, you are probably the perfect dinner party host. Set new challenges for yourself – a pop-up supper party to test your small-talk skills or running weekly soirées with themed cuisine. Glean specialist knowledge from an expert such as a top sommelier on a wine course ([decanter.com](http://decanter.com)) or master confectioner ([confectionerycourses.co.uk](http://confectionerycourses.co.uk)).



## 35 TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS

If you take pictures, rather than mere snaps, your talent needs feeding to grow. Enter competitions, develop a speciality such as wildlife or black and white and improve your technical know-how with online tutorials (try [photo.net](http://photo.net) and [luminous-landscape.com](http://luminous-landscape.com)). Send your best to an appropriate picture library – they might just get snapped up!





## 36 BEING HANDY ROUND THE HOUSE

While you may list tiling the kitchen or putting up shelves as favourite activities, others dread such tasks and would rather pay someone to do them. To earn some extra cash, put your skills to good use as a painter-decorator, taking on jobs at weekends to test the water. If you're serious about going full-time, gain electrician or plumber qualifications on a course ([cityandguilds.com](http://cityandguilds.com)).

## 37 LEADING A WALK

If you are good at map-reading, others who enjoy walking will happily hand over route selection, distance and location of the all-important refreshment stop to you. Put a notice in the local shop and keep it simple until you get into your stride. Pack a first-aid kit, extra snacks, spare socks and water, swot up on a few key points of interest and practise the route first.



## 38 RAISING FUNDS

Are you always the one asked to persuade local businesses to donate prizes for the annual raffle? Do you convince the estate agent to sponsor the summer fête? Then your talent clearly lies in fundraising and you probably combine charm, persuasion and tenacity in equal measures. Take steps to turn your ad hoc efforts into an income – volunteer your fundraising services to local charities, learn about grant sources and application techniques and you could eventually charge a fee.







## 39 ORGANISING AN EVENT

Every community needs one – that person willing to take on the trials (but also the plaudits) of planning and running a big event. You're probably already on several local committees and have the panto, craft show and school fair under your belt. You delegate with panache and can run a meeting like clockwork. These talents can take you far – perhaps a party-planning business or a job in event management. Learn even more from *The Event Manager's Bible* (How To Books, £14.99).

## 40 APPRECIATING WINE

Can you pick out a classic Chianti, a fruity Sauvignon or full-bodied Bordeaux to partner every stage of a meal? If you enjoy discovering and tasting new wines, develop your palate and knowledge with *The Complete Wine Tasting Course*, an interactive CD Rom course designed to turn you from 'novice' to 'nose' (£36.26 from [wineware.co.uk](http://wineware.co.uk)). Build up your confidence even further on a special wine-tasting holiday – try [winetastingfrance.com](http://winetastingfrance.com).







## 41 SINGING WELL

Always being told you've the voice of an angel? Then perhaps you should consider tuning-up with some lessons from a professional (find one near you on the Association of Teachers of Singing website, [aotos.org.uk](http://aotos.org.uk)). Once you are confident about your ability, why not join forces with a local band or set up a community choir to sing at events and help raise money for local causes?

## 42 BUYING THOUGHTFUL GIFTS

Do you delight in finding the perfect present for the foodie, craftsperson, wine-lover or gardener in your life year after year? Are you filled with a sense of excitement and anticipation rather than dread at the thought of Christmas and birthday lists? In today's time-poor society you may be able to relieve others of a burden while building up a personal present-buying service through your own website – for advice on setting one up, visit [howtobooks.co.uk/business](http://howtobooks.co.uk/business).



## 43 MAKING PRESERVES

If the shelves of your kitchen dresser are lined with glistening jars of jewel-bright jams and jellies, spread the word about your perfect preserves by giving them as gifts – pretty labels, covers and ribbons provide a stylish finishing touch. Explore your skill further and increase your repertoire with a day session at River Cottage HQ in Devon ([rivercottage.net](http://rivercottage.net)) or Waltham Place in Berkshire ([walthamplace.com](http://walthamplace.com)).



# DESIGNING A GARDEN



**44** DESIGNING A GARDEN

If friends admire your horticultural handiwork and ask your advice, you clearly have green-fingered flair. At [bbc.co.uk/gardening/design](http://bbc.co.uk/gardening/design), you can see planting plans and designs from well-known names, learn the key elements of different styles of garden, use a 'virtual garden' tool for designing and even get advice about a career in this field.

## 45 PLANNING A HOLIDAY

balance carefully researched arrangements with flexibility to enjoy spontaneous adventures. If the planning is one of the fun bits of your break, take on the task for friends with holiday fatigue – keep it formal, have

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# 46

## WRITING A SHORT STORY

Find yourself coming up with new plot lines and characters on a daily basis? Don't keep your fiction a closed book – begin a blog and invite constructive criticism from readers. Improve your style with an online creative writing module ([uea.ac.uk](http://uea.ac.uk)) or join a supportive writers' group (see [nawg.co.uk](http://nawg.co.uk)). For inspiration, visit [theshortstory.org.uk](http://theshortstory.org.uk), a website dedicated to promoting the art form.



# 47

## KNITTING A JUMPER

Holding a class for beginners or simply organising a group of fellow needle-wielders can be a rewarding way to further your skill and turn it into an income or make a hobby a sociable event. Read Sharon Brant's *Ultimate Knitting Bible* (Collins & Brown, £25) to learn more and, if you're keen to sell the items you make, set up a blog at [blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com). For free knitting patterns, visit [allaboutyou.com/craft](http://allaboutyou.com/craft) or [knitrowan.com](http://knitrowan.com).



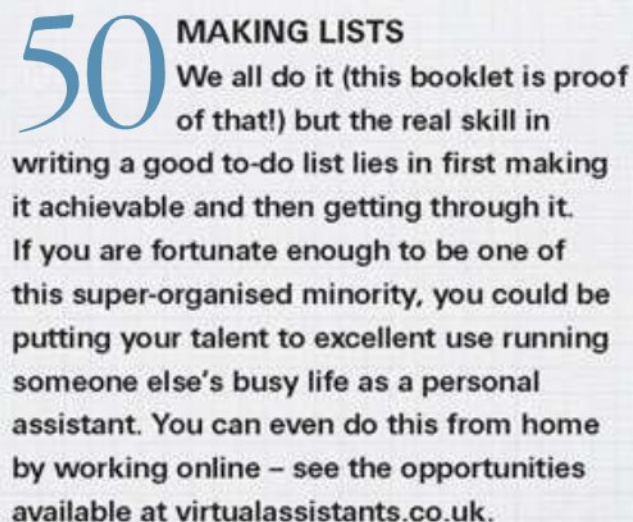




**48 SKETCHING A SCENE**  
Draw on your artistic skills and produce pictures of people's pets, houses, gardens or views for a fee. Start by offering to do one for free for a popular pub in return for leaving your business cards next to it. Once established, you could even strike up a deal with a local framer. Exhibit your work at an art fair in your area or approach cafés and restaurants to hang work on their walls.



**49 DESIGNING JEWELLERY**  
Unique handmade necklaces, earrings and bracelets make wonderful gifts, but have you thought about teaching your creative skills to others? By running children's classes in the school holidays and offering evening or weekend courses to adults, you could enjoy sharing your passion while showcasing your designs and making a little money that could more than pay for your hobby. Learn new techniques yourself on a number of short courses available ([westdean.org.uk](http://westdean.org.uk) or [cityandguilds.com](http://cityandguilds.com)).



**50 MAKING LISTS**  
We all do it (this booklet is proof of that!) but the real skill in writing a good to-do list lies in first making it achievable and then getting through it. If you are fortunate enough to be one of this super-organised minority, you could be putting your talent to excellent use running someone else's busy life as a personal assistant. You can even do this from home by working online – see the opportunities available at [virtualassistants.co.uk](http://virtualassistants.co.uk).





# Turn your talent into a business

Kitchen table talents can be used to earn a living, so not only can you enjoy pursuing the hobby you love – you can also make money from it. Here's how, says small-business expert Emma Jones

## TALENT EQUALS TURNOVER

Whether your strength happens to lie in fashion, food or fitness, it's perfectly possible to apply that talent and turn it into income. Follow these basic steps that can be taken in your spare time – you don't have to give up a day job and they can fit around running a house or looking after children.

## START WITH RESEARCH

You'll want to be sure there's a market of people ready to buy the results of your talent. Find out about your potential customers – where they are currently shopping, how they like to buy and who their key influencers are. Look at what your competitors are doing well (and maybe not so well!) and decide what you will charge, bearing in mind customers are willing to pay more for a niche product they can't find

elsewhere. If you're creating something handmade, this could mean you are unique, so factor this into your pricing. Either do your research online by visiting popular forums and trade websites or hit the streets with a clipboard, questionnaire and a smile. Talk to friends and family to get their input, too.

## MAKE A PLAN

With your research in hand, devise a strategy. It only need cover four pages or so to include your idea, how you're going to promote yourself, ways of getting your product or service to market and the financials that show a profit at the end of the day.

## SPREAD THE WORD

Promote your product or service and watch sales roll in. Issue a press release, host an event, enter an award and have profiles

on well-populated platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Your marketing will set you up as an expert in your field and you can do this using social media sites, without spending a single penny.

## BE PREPARED

Use these as headings for your business plan and you are off the starting blocks:

- **Idea** What is your product or service?
- **Market** Who are your customers?
- **Operations** How will you produce and deliver what you are offering?
- **Financials** What are your costs, how much will you charge for the finished product and does this show a profit?
- **Friends** Do you have a support network of advisers?







## MEET THE PUBLIC

- Consider displaying and selling your products at events: from weekly local farmers' markets to the *Country Living* Magazine fairs and shows.
- Before the event, tell people you're going and let them know where they can find you.
- On the day, be clear about what you're offering, attract people to your stand with give-aways or enticing refreshments, and collect data so you can follow-up with potential customers afterwards.



## A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Make sure your business cards and promotional materials are well designed and good quality in order to create a positive first impression. If you don't wish to display your home address as a business premises, consider having a virtual office which comes with a professional-sounding address and arrange for post to be sent on to you.

## MAKE THE MOST OF TECHNOLOGY

Have the business work for you while you are busy doing other

things, with a stylish website that attracts an audience and makes it clear and easy to buy from. Bearing in mind that time is your most important asset, make the most of it by investing in web-based e-mail systems, time-tracking software and a decent phone so you can carry on working wherever you are.

## MAKE SALES

Write a list of contacts, friends and family you think will be interested in what you have to offer. Get in touch with them individually and clearly outline

the benefits of buying. Maximise the opportunities presented by powerful online sales platforms: for home-crafted items, list them on handmade marketplace sites such as [etsy.com](http://etsy.com), [folksy.com](http://folksy.com) and [notonthehighstreet.com](http://notonthehighstreet.com), and if you're selling business services, try [elance.com](http://elance.com) and [bitsythis.com](http://bitsythis.com). These websites attract customers on your behalf and offer you a direct route to market.

## CREATE A SPACE

Keep a place in the house that is reserved as your designated office/work area and decorate it





## DO WHAT YOU DO BEST AND OUTSOURCE THE REST

This is a strategy that applies throughout, from making part-time earnings to growing into a full-time venture. Stick to the activity you know best and get help from others in areas such as accounting, admin, sales, PR and marketing. Keep in touch with business partners using free or low-cost tools such as Basecamp, Huddle, Glasscubes or Tinchat and your enterprise will run smoothly and profitably.

### Emma Jones is founder of Enterprise Nation

(enterprisenation.com), which offers small-business support. A business expert, she is the author of *Spare Room Start Up*, *Go Global* and *Working 5 to 9*. We have five of Emma's Start-Up Kits (£25)\*, with more than £400-worth of offers, to give away. See our Kitchen Table Talent Awards feature in the April issue of CL.

with inspiring furnishings and items that increase productivity: a vision board, sound system and a sturdy desk and chair.

### TELL THE TAXMAN

We have a duty to inform HM Revenue & Customs of activities within three months

of trading. It is straightforward to register but it's best to seek advice if you are at the point of considering whether you should set up as a sole trader, partnership or limited company. Keep the tax bill as low as possible by claiming business and home-working expenses.

**"If you have a day job, it's wise to tell your boss you're earning outside office hours. In my book *Working 5 to 9*, I outline how to go about this conversation. Most employers see running a business in your spare time as a good thing as they benefit from the new skills you're gaining without having to pay for any training."**







## Useful contacts

### COURSES AND QUALIFICATIONS

**BBC Learning** ([bbc.co.uk/learning/adults](http://bbc.co.uk/learning/adults)).

**LearnDirect** (0800 101 901; [learndirect.co.uk/businessinfo/](http://learndirect.co.uk/businessinfo/)) England and Wales' official online learning resource with a section for business-related courses.

**Mind Tools** ([mindtools.com](http://mindtools.com)) Free internet resource with life-skill tips.

**Money for Learning** ([lifelonglearning.co.uk/moneytolearn/](http://lifelonglearning.co.uk/moneytolearn/)) Financial support.

**Open College of the Arts** (0800 731 2116; [oca-uk.com](http://oca-uk.com)) Home-study courses in arts, crafts and design.

**The Open University** (0845 300 6090; [open.ac.uk/stepforward](http://open.ac.uk/stepforward)).

**Skills Development Scotland** (0141 285 6000; [skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk](http://skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk)).

**UK Commission for Employment and Skills** [ukces.org.uk](http://ukces.org.uk).

**Volunteering databases:** Scotland ([volunteerscotland.org.uk](http://volunteerscotland.org.uk)). England ([volunteering.org.uk](http://volunteering.org.uk)). Wales ([wcva.org.uk/volunteering](http://wcva.org.uk/volunteering)). Northern Ireland ([volunteering-ni.org](http://volunteering-ni.org)). Timebank ([timebank.org.uk](http://timebank.org.uk)).

### BUSINESS SUPPORT

**Bitsythis.com** – sourcebook of people who can help your business grow.

**British Franchise Association** (01235 820 470; [thebfa.org](http://thebfa.org)).

**Business Connect Wales** ([startups.co.uk/business-connect-wales.html](http://startups.co.uk/business-connect-wales.html)).

**Business Gateway** (0845 609 6611; [bgateway.com](http://bgateway.com)) and **Highlands and**

**Islands Enterprise** (01463 234171; [hie.co.uk](http://hie.co.uk)) Practical advice and support for new businesses in Scotland.

**Business Link** (0845 600 9006; [businesslink.gov.uk](http://businesslink.gov.uk)) Official small business support service in England.

**Charity Commission** (0845 300 0218; [charitycommission.gov.uk](http://charitycommission.gov.uk)) Offers advice to charities in England and Wales.

**Community Interest Companies** ([bis.gov.uk/policies/business-law/community-interest-companies](http://bis.gov.uk/policies/business-law/community-interest-companies)) Government information on CICs. See also [cicregulator.gov.uk](http://cicregulator.gov.uk) for how to set up a CIC.

**Invest Northern Ireland** (028 9069 8000; [investni.com](http://investni.com)).

**The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator** (01382 220446; [oscr.org.uk](http://oscr.org.uk)).

**Plunkett Foundation** (01993 810730; [plunkett.co.uk](http://plunkett.co.uk)) Advice and financing for rural projects, including community-run shops.

**School for Startups** (020 709 9700; [schoolforstartups.co.uk](http://schoolforstartups.co.uk)) Business training for entrepreneurs from former *Dragons' Den* guru Doug Richard.

**Whichfranchise.com** (0141 204 0050; [whichfranchise.com](http://whichfranchise.com)). Advice on applying for UK franchises.

### MARKET RESEARCH

**British Chambers of Commerce** (020 7654 5800; [britishchambers.org.uk](http://britishchambers.org.uk)). Details of local chambers of commerce across the UK.

### Countryside Council for Wales

(0845 130 6229; [ccw.gov.uk](http://ccw.gov.uk)) Provides information and statistics on rural areas and market towns. No equivalent bodies in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

**Market Research Society** (020 7490 4911; [marketresearch.org.uk](http://marketresearch.org.uk)) Offers a good, free beginners' guide to market research.

### National Association of Local

**Councils** (020 7637 1865; [nalc.gov.uk](http://nalc.gov.uk)). Good links to parish and community councils in England and Wales and other local government-related sites.

**Association of Scottish Community Councils** (0845 644 5153; [ascc.org.uk](http://ascc.org.uk))

**Office for National Statistics** (0845 601 3034; [statistics.gov.uk](http://statistics.gov.uk)). Census and other statistical data.

**Commission for Rural Communities** (01242 521381; [ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://ruralcommunities.gov.uk)) State of the countryside report 2010 has facts and figures on rural areas.

### RULES & REGULATIONS

**Environment Agency** (0870 850 6506; [environment-agency.gov.uk/netregs](http://environment-agency.gov.uk/netregs)). Advice on environmental regulations affecting small businesses in England and Wales.

**Food Standards Agency** (020 7276 8829; [food.gov.uk](http://food.gov.uk)) Information and guidelines on hygiene regulations.

**Health and Safety Executive** (0845 345 0055; [hse.gov.uk](http://hse.gov.uk)).

**HM Revenue & Customs** (0845 915





4515; hmrc.gov.uk/startingup) Helpline for newly self-employed.

**Northern Ireland Environment Agency** (0845 302 0008; doeni.gov.uk).  
**Scottish Environment Protection Agency** (01786 457700; sepa.org.uk).  
**Trading Standards Institute** (0845 404 0506; tradingstandards.gov.uk).

## RAISING FINANCE

**Co-operative & Community Finance** (0117 916 6750; co-opandcommunity.finance.coop) Finance for co-ops and social enterprises.

**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs** (0845 933 5577; defra.gov.uk) Details of rural development grant schemes.

**Government Funding Database** (govfundingdbni.nics.gov.uk/gfdpublic). Government grants to the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.

**NFU Mutual** (0800 316 4661; nfumutual.co.uk/farmers) Finances for farm-related ventures.

**The Prince's Trust** (0800 842 842; princes-trust.org.uk). Offers financial help to people aged 18-30 through loans, grants and mentors.

**Triodos Bank** (0800 328 2181; triodos.co.uk). Loans to environment/community-based businesses.

## NETWORKING/ADVICE

**Business in the Community** (020 7566 8650; bitc.org.uk) For better

business standards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Country Land & Business Association** (020 7235 0511; cla.org.uk) Organisation for owners of land, property and businesses in rural England and Wales.

**Enterprise Nation** (enterprisenation.com) Small-business support, communities, networking and events.

**Everywoman** (020 7981 2574; everywoman.com) Business owners' online network.

**Federation of Small Businesses** (01253 336000; fsb.org.uk) Practical advice on starting a business.

**FARMA** (farma.org.uk) National Farmers' Retail & Markets Association.

**Farmers' Markets** (0845 458 8420; farmersmarkets.net).

**Farmshop** (07855 252151; farmshop.net) Network of regional food suppliers and requirers.

**National Farmers' Union** (024 7685 8500; nfuonline.com).

**New Economics Foundation** (020 7820 6300; neweconomics.org) Independent think-and-do tank that inspires real economic wellbeing.

**Prowess** (01603 762355; prowess.org.uk) Trade association for women in business.

**Rural Women's Network** (01768 869511; ruralwomen.org.uk).

**Self-test temperament quizzes** Visit keirse.com and bizmove.com/other/quiz.htm.

**WFO** (0844 335 0342; wfu.org.uk) The Women's Food and Farming Union.

**WiRE Women in Rural Enterprise** (01952 815338; wireuk.org) Advice and support, workshops and events.

## FURTHER READING

*Go Global: How to take your business to the world* by Emma Jones (Brightword, £14.99)

*How They Started: How 30 good ideas became great businesses* by David Lester (Crimson Publishing, £12.99)

*Spare Room Start Up: How to start a business from home* by Emma Jones (Harriman House, £12.99)

*The Complete Small Business Guide: a sourcebook for new and small businesses* by Colin Barrow (Capstone, £14.99)

*The Small Business Handbook: the entrepreneur's definitive guide to starting and growing a business* by Philip Webb and Sandra Webb (Prentice Hall, £18.99)

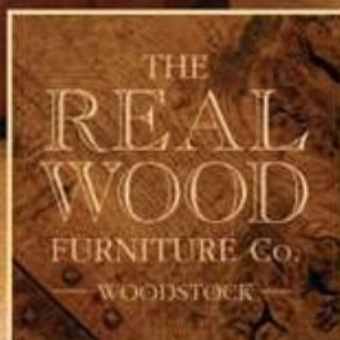
*Working 5 to 9: How to start a successful business in your spare time* by Emma Jones (Harriman House, £12.99)

**CL readers can buy all the books mentioned in this booklet at special prices – visit [allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk](http://allaboutyoubookshop.co.uk) or call 0871 803 6764.**



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